The ideology of Labourism and Britain's withdrawal from East of Suez

Thesis

THE IDEOLOGY OF LABOURISM AND BRITAIN'S WITHDRAWAL FROM EAST OF SUEZ

GEOFFREY LEE WILLIAMS, BA Hons. (Keele)
MA (London University)

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CONTAINS PULLOUTS

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ABSTRACT

THE IDEOLOGY OF LABOURISM AND BRITAIN'S IMPERIAL ROLE

This thesis seeks to examine the ideology of the Labour Party in relation to the Party's attitude towards Britain's role East of Suez since 1945. Both periods of office and opposition are examined in depth, although the major emphasis is on the period of office from October 1964 to June 1970. The ideology of Labourism is a synthesis of working-class politics and middle-class revisionism which became the basis of Labour's realpolitik in its foreign policy during and after the Second World War. Labour as a result of the influence of this ideology put nation before class. The leaders of the Labour movement aligned themselves - with a few notable exceptions - with all the national symbols of monarchy, judiciary and Parliament. They also identified themselves with the Commonwealth; an aspect central to this thesis because neither the utopian nor marxist left within the Labour Party found it expedient, or even moral, to fundamentally question the East of Suez role, until it was clear that it was inconsistent with Labour's ambitious social and economic programme. The imperial role was not at first rejected by the utopian and marxist left of the Party because it identified in the Commonwealth the basis of a possible neutralist foreign policy for Britain. When that proved a chimera the left repudiated the imperial role. The revisionist right and the Labourist centre regarded the East of Suez role as the basis of Britain's pretence to remain a great power. When that proved also a chimera the right repudiated the imperial role. This explains why the Labour leadership could embrace the imperial role with considerable enthusiasm and abandon it with alacrity when circumstances forced them to do so. Cultural Labourism and democratic socialist revisionism within the Labour Party became the dominant ideology of

the Labour government but was not an ideology which encouraged a consistent attitude towards international politics. The myth that a Labour government meant a commitment to a socialist foreign policy - which can never be defined - even in principle, was however effectively destroyed. Labour in office indeed differed only from the Conservatives in the slight emphasis it occasionally gave to pursuing national policies which in the long-run - and perhaps therefore never - might assist in the re-structuring of the international system.

INTRODUCTION

This thesis seeks to examine the ideology of the Labour Party in relation to the Party's attitude towards Britain's role East of Suez since 1945. Both periods of office and opposition are examined in depth, although the major emphasis is on the period of office from October 1964 to 1970. The major source of influence over external policy was the ideology of Labourism which is derived from the four distinct socialist groupings which the distinguished historian of the Labour Party, the late Professor G. D. H. Cole, identified as constituting the doctrinal basis of the Labour Party. Cole distinguishes four sorts of socialism - utopian, scientific, anarchist and evolutionary - but his principal distinction is between utopian socialism and 'scientific' socialism. Labourism, however, mediates "between nation and class and does so by establishing the general ascendency of nation over class."[1] I argue in this study that the ideology of Labourism is a synthesis of working-class power and middle-class revisionism - an equally contradictory mix of liberalism and collectivism - which was articulated by John Strachey and Anthony Crosland derived, perhaps, from Evan Durbin.[2] The ideology of Labourism became the basis of Labour's realpolitik in its foreign policy during and after the Second World War.

The utopian socialists identified in this thesis are the residual heirs of men like Owen and Blatchford who today are represented by figures like Fenner Brockway (now Lord Brockway) and Michael Foot.[3] As Cole

[1] Nairn, Tom. The Left Against Europe, p.81.

[2] See Evan, Durbin. The Politics of Democratic Socialism, for an example of early revisionist doctrine published in 1940.

[3] See the political beliefs of Lord Brockway in his own account, entitled Towards Tomorrow, 1977.

wrote "where most of the early socialists (the Utopians) differed from the marxists ... was ... in resting their case on arguments of justice and human brotherhood rather than on a conception of class-power".[1] The 'scientific' socialists which are also identified in this study are the marxists who claim that socialism must come about by way of class-conflict. However, the ideological character of Labour's foreign policy is essentially derived from Labourism and revisionism which have since the mid-fifties become synonomous. This ideology encapsulates working-class interests, that is, a set of attitudes, preferences and feelings of a distinctive group. Labour as a result of the influence of this ideology put nation before class. The leaders of the Labour movement aligned themselves - with a few notable exceptions - with all the national symbols of monarchy, judiciary and Parliament. They also identified themselves with the Commonwealth; an aspect central to this thesis because neither the utopians nor the marxist left within the Labour Party found it expedient, or even moral, to fundamentally question the East of Suez role until it was clear that it was inconsistent with Labour's ambitious social and economic programme.

This study seeks to relate the ideology of Labourism to Britain's wider politico-strategic interests as perceived by the Labour Party both in power and in opposition and, indeed, only Chapter II concentrates on the solely military character of Britain's East of Suez role, covering

[1] DeCrespigny and Cronin. Ideologies of Politics, p.83.

the period starting with the war in Korea and ending in the year of Labour's first major Defence Review. But the importance of Chapter II to this study should not be underestimated simply because it deals with the nature and style of British deployments East of Suez. I have included in Annex a, b, c and d diagrams which illustrate salient features of Britain's military role outside Europe which certainly had an impact upon Labour's own strategic and political perceptions. This brief analysis of Britain's emergency operations during the first two decades of the nuclear era seeks to grapple with two direct and simple questions: what had happened? and what military power had been most used? The answers to these questions are of direct relevance to Labour's attitude towards maintaining Britain as a military power capable of contributing to emergencies, particularly East of Suez. (For a discussion of the nature of these operations see the attached diagrams relating to the Preface to Chapter II).

Finally, turning to the ideology of Labourism, it is important to establish the three different and differing perspectives of the Labour Party as they have developed historically. The Labour Party approaches its external and domestic policies from three perspectives: those of trade unionism, socialism, and government. These differing perspectives have not so far resulted in the growth of distinct groupings - hence this study is concerned with ideology in its widest-sense and not with decision-making as such - but they have thrown up peculiar problems and unresolved contradictions for the Labour Party,

particularly when Labour is in power. Trade Unions are products of industrial capitalism, organizations bent upon the articulation and representation of worker's interests. Clearly trade unions need capitalism as a plant requires water. The Trade Union power-base is derived from the rich economic pluralism of western capitalism which ideologically makes the trade unions seek independence vis-v-vis the state. As free organisations the trade unions are inherently anti-socialist. Free trade unionism and socialism are clearly incompatible. A fully-fledged socialist state threatens to plan the unions out of existence and to cast them into the oblivion of an obsolescent capitalist economic pluralism. Therefore the great trade union leaders - Bevin and Deakin of the TGWU, Watson of the NUM, Williamson of the NUGMW and Carron of the AEU - were always suspicious and even hostile towards the socialist "intellectuals" like Laski, Cole, Crosland and Crossman, including, for a brief period, even Hugh Gaitskell, Labour's first real right-wing Leader. Clearly, insofar as the Labour Party remains a predominantly trade union party, the ideology of Labourism, somewhat attentuated by revisionist doctrine, remains the essentially distinctive symbol of the Labour Party in the twentieth century. Yet the socialist element within the Labour Party remains because the party needs a set of beliefs and values to distinguish it from the liberals and from the more 'progressive' Tories. The Fabians urged the idea of clause IV, which commits the Labour Party to take into common ownership the means of production, distribution and exchange, upon the trade union leaders as a

relevant ideology for an independent working-class party seeking power with middle-class support. The potential administrators of a socialist commonwealth were to be recruited from the professional classes. This historic compromise resulted in middle-class socialists acquiring their clause IV and in the trade union leaders acquiring the infintely more tangible weapon of the all-powerful bloc votes of the party conference. The unions proved flexible when the adaptation of working-class interests required the application of socialist doctrine in regard to a limited programme of nationalization. This proved to be the case with regard to the nationalization of the mines and in the support given to the modest but timely programme of socialization which Mr. Attlee's government introduced between 1945 and 1951. However, the clause four commitment remained largely notional in the eyes of the trade union leaders. The trade unions supported Britain's traditional great power commitments with marked enthusiasm, consistency and, indeed, proved themselves as stalwart opponents of the monarch's enemies at home and abroad. Both the trade union perspective and the socialist one were well-established within the Labour movement by 1918 - if not before - but a genuinely governmental perspective took longer to emerge and to mature. This was to prove of great importance in the sphere of foreign-policy making because the earlier minority Labour governments before the war were not expected to change things very much. Labour simply lacked detailed policies in regard to internal and external policies. It was assumed with bovine optimism that a Labour Government would

manipulate the capitalist economy in the interests of the working-class in conditions approaching the ideal. In fact, Britain's secular economic decline had accelerated by 1929-31 and the Labour Government was forced to make remedies to save the capitalist system which inevitably brought it into opposition with both its trade union and socialist perspectives. Labour's historic contradiction was born. But this contradiction was all but removed after the final crisis of 1931. However, by 1945, with the arrival of the post-war Keynesian revolution, the Labour Party was able to accept that a modified capitalist system was just compatible with the 'Socialist' goals to which the party was formally committed. The Labour movement could achieve a workable consensus in regard to domestic and external policies, in that more favourable environment. The emergence of the 'managed' mixed-economy complemented the somewhat traditional view of 'national interests'. This was seen to be the case after 1945. The stage was set for Mr. Ernest Bevin and for the triumph of a Labourist-revisionist foreign policy based upon historical 'national interests' as perceived by successive Labour leaders. This thesis is concerned with analysing this singular and important development with particular reference to the imperial role and to the decision to withdraw from East of Suez which the government of Mr. Wilson finally took in circumstances which need further explanation and analysis. Part I deals with the period of opposition and Part II with the period of power.

PREFACE TO CHAPTER II

"A Study of United Kingdom Emergency Operations from 1950 to 1966"

The following analysis relates to annex a, b, c.

I seek to answer two direct and simple questions: what had happened? and what had been most used?

Perhaps this analysis should have started at 1945, but to have done so would have created an unreal picture because at that time most countries had inflated military forces and many of the crises were directly connected with the aftermath of the Second World War. Therefore 1950 seems a good round date which gives a span of 17 years - short in terms of historical perspective but packed with incident. This is, moreover, a period which roughly covers Labour opposition years but not entirely.

Type I Counter-Insurgency Operations

This is by far the largest group. If resistance to Egyptian pressure on the Canal Zone is included there were ten counter-insurgency operations.

Canal Zone	Eritrea
Malaya	Kenya
Cyprus (EOKA)	Aden
Bahrein	British Guiana
Muscat/Oman	Borneo

The most obvious thing about these operations was their long duration and the sustained effort needed for success. Two other things are clear: the preponderance of the Army 'Scarlet' in this type of operation and the increasing use of air transport and the decrease in other types of air support.

Type II Intervention Operations

There were five of these:

Suez	East African Mutinies
Jordan	Azahari's Rebellion in Brunei
Kuwait	

They were all short and sharp, and involved much larger naval and air forces than the typical counter-insurgency operations. If an operation lasted any length of time the Army strength increased and the Naval and Air effort settled down to a routine level. This was best shown on the Borneo plot when the initial intervention against Azahari in Brunei gradually turned into a counter-insurgency type of operation in Borneo.

The very prominent Naval 'blips' which appear in these operations, and indeed the majority of similar 'blips' in the other naval operations, were caused by the presence of carriers. Whilst the extent of these 'blips' was largely a product of the carrier's high scoring under my point system, their frequency and position at the beginning of so many operations does illustrate how intelligent use of any warning period together with the inherent mobility of naval forces had more often than not enabled the United Kingdom to deploy these powerful and effective units in the right place at the right time.

Type III Specific Deterrent Deployments

In addition to the United Kingdom's normal world-wide dispositions of ships, troops and aircraft which contributed to deterrence in general, there were a number of specific air and naval deployments which did not result in active operations because they succeeded in containing the threat and enabled political action to be taken successfully. It would

be wrong not to show these operations because they represented a very real strain on Naval and Air resources. Six of them are shown:

The Persian Gulf Patrol	Beira Patrol	
Abadan	Western Malaysian Patrol	)
Bahamas Patrol	Naval and Air Strike Force facing Indonesia	) Part of Confrontation

It is imperative to list all the United Kingdom's military operations during the 17 years. There were some 85 operations, the details of which are set out in Annex a. Only 22 of these could be classed as major operations requiring study in depth. These are shown in heavy type.

It is now necessary to plot the operations in a way which will show their duration and scale, and how they fitted into the pattern of world events. In Annex b are the results in relation to duration and scale. Along the top of the diagram are the years; at the side, the main theatres of operations, and at the bottom are shown the 63 minor operations in annual totals. 44 of these were military operations and the remaining 19 were assistance to civil authorities such as hurricane and famine relief or fishery protection. There was no obvious pattern in these minor operations, but they averaged three per year, two military and one civil assistance.

In plotting the 22 major operations the widths of the coloured bands represent numbers of operational units engaged. The colour code is:

Royal Navy Units		Dark Blue
Army Units		Scarlet
Royal Air Force:	Transport Units	Hatchered Light Blue
	Other Operational Units	Solid Light Blue

Duration of Operations

Considering the duration of operations first, two things stand out: The length of operations; most were far longer than expected. They averaged 3½ years per operation. The Concurrency of Operations; there

were rarely less than three operations in hand at any one time except in the period of the 1960/62 'Gap' which I will be referring to later.

Scale of Operations

There is one overwhelming weakness in this diagram. It must not be used to compare inter-Service effort for two reasons: firstly, because the point system used to relate major units of the three Services is only a crude approximation (e.g. one frigate = one battalion = one air squadron); and, secondly, and much more important, because the United Kingdom did not have to fight for naval or air superiority except fleetingly at Suez, in the 17 years. It is impossible to quantify and present diagrammatically the effort needed to maintain the deterrent effect of general naval and air presence. The 22 operations fell broadly into four types:

Type I Counter-Insurgency Operations
Type II Intervention Operations
Type III Specific Deterrent Deployments
Type IV UN Operations

For a number of reasons the Iceland or Antarctic Patrols are not shown; they are included, however, in the 'minor' operations total.

Nor are the separate operations in the Western Malaysian Patrol and the Naval and Air Strike Force facing Indonesia included. They are part of the complex of operations which are shown as one operation within the black 'Confrontation Box'. The Commonwealth operations against Indonesia combine examples of the first three types of operation and of true deterrence: the initial intervention in Brunei showing the characteristic

high level of Naval and Air activity; then the counter-insurgency in Borneo with its long duration and, in this case, the marked increase in tactical air transport effort; the deterrent deployment of naval and air forces in the Western Malaysian Patrol; and, finally, the true deterrent strike force on Malaysian airfields and in Malaysian waters which probably did more than anything else to discourage Indonesia from escalating her 'Confrontation' with Malaysia.

Type IV UN Operations

There were three United Nations Operations in which the United Kingdom took part:

Korea
Cyprus (UN)
Congo

but they were peculiar in that the United Kingdom was not contributing balanced forces, and so their shape looks unreal when plotted with only the United Kingdom contribution showing. For instance, in Korea, the Royal Navy's presence looks and was large compared with that of the British Army although this was essentially a land campaign. The latter contributed only some 8 major units to the Commonwealth Division whereas the Royal Navy maintained a force of 1 carrier, 2 cruisers and 6-8 destroyers/frigates in Korean waters.

The Pattern of World Events

My third task in answering the question 'What has happened?' was to relate these United Kingdom emergency operations to world events during the 17 years. At Annex c there is a diagram designed to do this. At the top there is the same date line as before. Immediately below

the date line there is a selection of major politico-military highlights - one per year - to set the perspective of world events. In the centre, the dark blue, scarlet and light blue shape is the sum of the 22 United Kingdom emergency operations shown on the previous diagram (Annex b). Below this comes the major military operations during the 17 years in which the United Kingdom was not involved. And finally, the line of mushrooms at the bottom shows the stages in the proliferation of nuclear weapons.

The major military operations in which the United Kingdom was not involved are surprisingly few, but they do confirm her experience of the length and costliness of counter-insurgency operations and the relative shortness of intervention operations. The diagram, however, does not show the great difference in scale of effort between our operations and those of the French and Americans. The French used 263,000 men in Indo-China, and 400,000 in Algeria at the height of their campaigns. The Americans had so far deployed a maximum of 464,000 in South Vietnam. By comparison, our 44,000 soldiers and airmen in Cyprus and 51,000 in Malaya were small.

One of the interesting things about this diagram is the 1960/62 'Gap' in United Kingdom Emergency Operations. This may well have been caused by random coincidence, but three specific streams of events probably helped to create this pattern.

First there was the major change in British Defence Policy which was initiated by the Duncan Sandys' White Paper of 1957. In 1950 the United Kingdom increased National Service to two years; in 1952 the Home Guard was resuscitated - an event which is often forgotten; and yet by 1957 - in a space of only seven years - the United Kingdom's Defence

had swung through 180 degrees as the significance of the nuclear bursts on the bottom of this diagram seeped through its body-politic. The 'Gap' probably represents the watershed between the era of National Service with its dependence on conventional weapons and conscript manpower and the era of Deterrence based on nuclear weapons and regular forces. It is arguable as to whether the last burst on the bottom line - the Chinese Nuclear Device - did not herald another major change of policy in the years to come. The second stream of events was closely related to the first. It was only possible to abandon National Service if the United Kingdom was prepared to liquidate its residual Colonial responsibilities as quickly as possible. It is important to note the position of Macmillan's 'Wind of Change' speech on the top line. During the 'Gap' period grants of independence were more numerous, particularly in Africa, than at any other time and this seems to have taken the sting out of many potential insurgency situations.

For a time, as the 'Gap' shows, emergency operations were at their lowest. However, the 'Wind of Change' speech conceivably suggested to people like Nasser and Soekarno a further weakening of the British position. Their efforts to accelerate the United Kingdom's withdrawal from her remaining overseas bases caused the upsurge in operations in the later years of the period.

Nasser and Soekarno's appreciations, however, did not take into account the third stream of events. Revulsion to the ponderous build up at Suez encouraged the United Kingdom to look for quicker means of bringing military power to bear. Transport Command's build up and the development of the Commando Carriers, both of which were planned before.

Suez, were given fresh impetus and paid a good dividend at Kuwait. Although Kuwait was not a perfect military operation, it set the trend and gave a further spur to the development of air transported and amphibious forces. The 'Gap' may well be the watershed between two eras in strategic mobility - the era of sea transport supplemented by air and the era of air transport supplemented by amphibious forces. The theory of 'quick in' saving time and effort later, seems to have worked well in operations after the 'Gap'.

As a conclusion to my attempt to answer the first question 'What has actually happened?' I make some sweeping generalizations whose only merit is that they appear to be consistent with the assumptions made by Labour's defence thinkers in Opposition. On Plate I is set out a diagrammatic version of the Spectrum of War.

a. The Deterrent Effectiveness (Red Curve) of the United Kingdom's forces, indeed the forces of the Western alliance as a whole, in preventing outbreaks of the use of force during the period.

b. The Duration of Operations (Green Curve) which is an indirect measure of the effort expended in the various types of operation during the period.

c. The Threat to World Stability (Blue Curve) at the end of the period.

The first two are self-explanatory, but the third needs some amplification. Considered first are those bands of the spectrum which were most applicable to each major operational theatre - the primary arcs which are shown in blue on the bottom of Plate I. There seems little doubt that the upper end of the spectrum (i.e. the nuclear and full conventional bands) belonged essentially to Europe and the

confrontation of the Super-Powers. The central bands have been in the primary arc of the Middle East where the topography is suitable for heavy conventional weapons and where Russia had been providing countries like Egypt, Iraq and Syria with advanced equipment. The lower bands had been essentially the prerogative of the Far East and Africa where the topographical conditions and the inclinations of those who wish to use force favour these types of warfare.

Then considered next are the main dynamic forces which had arguably cause instability in each theatre. In Europe, Russian Communism was the main 'threat', but over the 17 years it had moved from open hostility through coexistence to the onset of detente, leaving the 'threat' over the 'upper bands' of the spectrum at a low ebb. In the Middle East, Arab nationalism had been a potent force, but disunity had made it less of a threat to world stability than Chinese style insurgencies which in the '60s had been upsetting the Far East and influencing events in Africa. Hence ~~are shown~~ the peak of the Blue 'threat' curve is shown lying over the 'lower bands' of the spectrum applicable to the Far Eastern Theatre.

Thus the peaks of 'duration' and 'threat' lie directly over the bands in which 'deterrent effectiveness' was weakest, and hence that the most pressing problem in the next decade appeared to be how to improve military efficiency in the 'lower band' operations. There was, however, one important proviso; improvements would have to be made without jeopardizing military efficiency in the 'upper bands' of the spectrum. This conclusion is shown diagrammatically on Plate II. The problem was how to raise the Red line over the 'lower bands' without letting it fall over the 'upper bands' - hence the arrow and pillar. Labour had plenty to contemplate.

In trying to answer the second question it is necessary to break down the large Red arrow on Plate II into its component parts - possibly four or five sub-arrows suggesting the most profitable fields for development in the next decade. The answers to the first question suggested that two of the sub-arrows were likely to be: Increasing Speed of Strategic Reaction and Increasing Speed of Tactical Reaction.

The success of the United Kingdom's air transported and amphibious forces since Kuwait pointed to the former, and the successful use of helicopters and transport aircraft in the Indonesian Confrontation suggested the latter. In studying what has been most used I sought confirmation of these two sub-arrows and looked for others. I found however, that there was no quick and easy way of answering the question.

The first things to look at are the changes in the deployment and the composition of the United Kingdom's forces over the 17 years. In deployment, there was a marked drift towards the Indo-Pacific area at the expense of the Mediterranean and Near East. In composition, the Naval trend was towards smaller but more complex ships; the Army's balance between fighting arms however remained remarkably constant; there was a marked increase in the proportion of transport aircraft with a corresponding decrease in fighter aircraft, the latter reflecting the decline in importance of the manned defensive fighter. Superimposed on these trends there was, of course, the major change of the nuclear deterrent responsibility from the RAF to the Royal Navy which was just beginning at the end of the period.

These case histories provide relevant background information about trends, and superficially appear at any rate to corroborate the thesis that the greatest threat had lain in the Far East and hence over the

lower bands' of the spectrum. They also illustrated the way in which the perceived threat had drawn the United Kingdom's forces eastwards. They did not, however, answer the specific question of what has been most used. To discover this an analysis of each of the 22 major operations was necessary, first by looking at which units and then at which weapons had been most used.

Units

In the main, the 22 operations were land campaigns with naval and air support because the United Kingdom was not challenged either upon the sea or in the air during the 17 years. Therefore, it is important to know what units the Army had used most. Plate III shows how many units of each of the three principal fighting arms were used on active operations per quarter year. The Infantry - the Army's maid of all work - is shown in a dominant position, but not quite so overwhelmingly so as the Scarlet on Plate III shows.

At sea, it was often difficult to distinguish between overall deployments designed to maintain a naval presence and those connected specifically with the 22 operations. As a generalisation every type of ship was used although often on tasks for which they were not primarily designed, the requirement being for hulls rather than for the specific weapon system carried. The inherent flexibility of United Kingdom naval forces enabled them to meet these requirements although for many of the operations this entailed the use of all available operational units and often for long periods. (This problem vexed Labour in Opposition to a great extent). Within the general overall operational deployment it is possible to identify on Plate IV three specific tasks on which

HM Ships were used: amphibious operations, off-shore patrol work and inshore patrol work.

In the air a very similar situation existed. There was no need to fight for air superiority and though it is not possible to quantify the deterrent effect of the United Kingdom's air deployments. Like the Royal Navy, every type of aircraft was used, again very often on tasks for which they were not primarily designed. Plate V shows the pattern over the 17 years. The outstanding feature of the diagram is in the increasing use of transport aircraft shown in the latter years, particularly helicopters, confirming the contention that improvement in speed of tactical reaction was one of the important trends. Strategic air transport forces are not shown because they were not under Theatre commanders.

In looking for the answer to this question, it is necessary to draw a notional ladder of escalation in an insurgency situation, typical of the 'lower bands'. This is shown in Black on Plate VI. Then in Green, the weapons which were used to damp down escalation are added; the conclusion therefore follows that there were two 'escalation barriers' which controlled the use of weapons. The first was the obvious 'nuclear escalation barrier' between nuclear and full conventional war. The second was not so obvious. There seemed to be something that prevented the use of heavier weapons in the 'lower bands', and this is marked as the 'heavy weapon barrier' on Plate VI. This barrier was caused by the possible coincidence of two further peaks in this area of the spectrum; firstly, there was the greatest need to minimise civilian casualties; and secondly, there was the greatest difficulty in target acquisition.

The paramount consideration in trying to re-impose constitutional government in a counter-insurgency situation was always the need to avoid alienating the civil population - the doctrine of minimum force. Unfortunately the heavier conventional weapons and surveillance systems are and remain at their weakest in the counter-insurgency environment. The weapons are too indiscriminate and surveillance on land is still in the stone age. The soldiers and police were in the position of the airmen before the invention of radar in the 1930s.

Conclusion

This brief survey based on the United Kingdom's emergency operations during the 17 years under review reveals that although there was no need to fight for naval or air superiority it would be wrong to suggest that success in these elements was any less important than it had been in previous military operations. However, it is clear that the greatest military weakness in the 'lower bands' in the 17 years had lain in failure to deter escalation from the police to the lowest level of military action - the counter-insurgency environment. There is some evidence to suggest that one of the reasons for this failure had been the unsuitability of some of the weapons used. There was little doubt that to improve British effectiveness in the anti-terrorist/guerilla role Britain had to ensure that the advanced conventional weapons systems of the future were sufficiently flexible to be used in the 'lower' as well as the 'upper bands' of the spectrum. Meanwhile those who wish to use force as a means of imposing political change could still do so because no one, still less the British government, had yet been able to give the policeman and the infantryman the necessary degree

of superiority to deter the terrorist and guerilla. This is an age old problem which used to be solved by reprisal. Such methods were no longer acceptable in the Western World. Britain would have to look for other and more humane ways of achieving the same end - deterrence of terrorism. Labour in its defence policy formulated in opposition endeavoured therefore to grapple with some of the problems revealed in this brief survey of emergency operations in the period 1950-1966. Those responsible for Labour's defence policy before 1964 were largely unaware of the details and difficulties associated with the mounting of emergency operations inescapable from an East of Suez role. However after 1964 the Labour Government discovered by a process of trial and error the exact cost and benefit of such a role.

CHAPTER I

THE IDEOLOGY OF LABOURISM

Why was Labour in favour of an imperial role in the post-war years? And what part did socialist ideology play in shaping the Labour Party's view of Britain's role East of Suez and why did no conherent socialist critique emerge which might have cast doubt on the validity of that role?

These are major questions which raise issues that go beyond the politics of the Labour Party. They invoke questions which impinge upon a whole range of political, strategic and economic factors which successive post-war governments have sought to grapple with in the making of Britain's external policies. This thesis is primarily concerned with the Labour Party and with the performance of the Labour governments of the mid-sixties which actually, however reluctantly, took the final decision to quit playing a major world role. The nature of Labour's ideology - or at least the various interpretations of it - is central to this study because the party's policies embody and reflect the commitment to certain values which are associated with socialism in its widest sense.[1] That is, with the existence of at least five aims which the Labour Party has been concerned to articulate, promote and introduce within the framework of its legislative programme once it has achieved power. Those five aims have traditionally been concered with social welfare, the equitable distribution of wealth, the pursuit of the classless society, the belief in the fundamental equality of all races and peoples, and the commitment to a mixed-economy with an attempt to establish the proper dividing line between the public and private spheres of responsibility.[2]

[1] See discussion of the syndrome of socialism in Finer, S.E., Berrington, H.B., and Bartholomew, D.J., Back-Bench Opinion in the House of Commons, 1955-59, London, 1961.

[2] See discussion of the nature of social democratic thought in Crosland, Anthony. The Future of Socialism, Jonathan Cape, 1965.

These five aims amount to the syndrome of democratic socialism in Britain. But in the context of Labour's defence and foreign policies the syndrome of socialism has always appeared less relevant or valid and no precise 'Socialist' foreign policy has proved possible either at a theoretical or operational level. Labour has found agreement over its external policies even more difficult to resolve than in the sphere of domestic policy where great difficulties have traditionally frustrated anything like complete party unanimity over long-term objectives and goals. Although we are concerned to identify Labour's ideology and the role it actually plays in policy-making in regard to the East of Suez controversy in the period, roughly speaking since 1950, this thesis also seeks to explore and analyse the nature of the Labour governments defence and foreign policies between 1964-1970. This involves a complex analysis of politico-strategic factors which continued to affect both the internal and external environment within which Labour sought to make policy whilst in control of the nation's affairs. It appears on the surface that Labour's ideological stance in the area of foreign policy was generally consistent with the ideology of Liberal-democracy rather than with socialism in any specific sense.[1] Even then it still remains a curious fact that Britain's imperial role excited so little attention from those who described themselves as 'socialist'.[2] Labour's internal debate proved turbulent when foreign policy was raised but the rationale of the East of Suez commitment was never seriously challenged or rejected.

[1] See discussion for foreign policy issues in regard to Labour in Haseler, Stephen. The Gaitskellites, Macmillan, 1969.

[2] One obvious and notable exception was John Strachey who examined the imperial role in his The End of Empire, Macmillan, 1960. Christopher Mayhew did in 1967 attempt to analyse the imperial role after his dramatic resignation from the Government in 1966. His book, Britain's Role Tomorrow, constitutes a serious piece of strategic analysis.

This thesis therefore examines the proposition that the ideology of socialism as represented by the various traditions from utopian socialism to the ideas associated with social democracy, is functional to Labour when in Opposition but (almost) irrelevant when related to the national priorities pursued by Labour in office: that socialist ideology proves to be a recessional factor when Labour addresses itself to the conditions prevailing in the international environment, although it is clear that in office Labour Cabinets succeed in mobilising ideological support for the fulfilment and pursuit of 'national interests'. If we are to regard ideologies as systems of practically orientated beliefs and attitudes related to social or political groups, then the failure of the 'socialists' to assert themselves does need special explanation.[1] Moreover, Labour's strong support for a post-imperial role needs critical reappraisal in the light of the party's foreign and defence policies. Successive Labour governments since the war have stoutly insisted that the governmental perspective which emphasizes continuity in policy and common definition of the public interest must take precedence over the socialist perspective which reflects a belief in dominant values, such as equality or co-operation or collective welfare or indeed internationalism. The predominant governmental perspective of the Labour Party was reinforced over the years by the attitude and interests of the trades unions. They, as a powerful producer group, looked towards government for protection and for the promotion of their interests.[2] Trade Union leaders never fudged

[1] De Crespigny, Anthony and Cronin, Jeremy, Ideologies of Politics, Oxford University Press, 1975, p.5.

[2] Allen, V.L., Trade Unions and the Government, London, 1960.

the issue of power. They possessed a clear set of attitudes towards government, towards society and towards their members which revealed a collectivist ideology compatible with socialism but also reconcilable with capitalism and liberal-democracy.

It is contended that indeed only one of the multiplicity of ideological groupings within the Labour Party had ever ignored or rejected the notion of power politics or even took the view that parliamentary power was not worth winning; which was a contention that the party was not as a whole disposed to support. Early in its history Labour became a parliamentary party with a large extra-parliamentary wing - the so-called Labour movement.[1] However, the least power conscious group were the so-called utopian socialists who were rightly accused of not possessing a coherent attitude towards political power or having a specific programme of action which could be implemented successfully.[2] This group, whatever their shortcomings in the area of domestic policies were undoubtedly deficient in facing up to the ugly realities of international politics. They rejected power politics as immoral and were thus more concerned with dispensing with them, because a Socialist society would be characterised by features fundamentally different from those of a capitalist society dominated by class exploitation and economic inequality.[3] In some unspecified way power in its widest sense - that aggregate at the disposal of a minority - would be dispersed or shared amongst the majority in society. These attitudes derived from Robert Owen and William Morris and were given almost classic expression by parliamentary

[1] See Ralph Miliband's marxist critique of Labour's preference for Parliamentary methods in his study Parliamentary Socialism, Merlin Press, 1973.

[2] See general discussion of this phenomenon in G.D.H. Cole's volumes entitled A Short History of the British Working-Class Movement, Vols. 1-3, Allen and Unwin, 1948.

[3] Pelling, H., The Origins of the Labour Party, London, 1954.

figures like George Lansbury and Fenner Brockway (later Lord Brockway) in their often eloquent advocacy of the brotherhood of man.[1] To them Socialism was fellowship. The actual influence of the utopian socialists and of the pacifi sts within the Labour movement - the christian socialists were a distinct and coherent sect - is difficult to determine. Clearly though they gave the Labour Party something like an emotional and intellectual distaste for power, particularly that aspect of power related to inter-state relations. As G.D.H. Cole wrote "all the 'Utopians' believed that apart from considerations of power, it was possible to affect the future by appealing to reason and conscience".[2] The belief that the balance of power was an evil exceeded only by that of war itself was a view which most utopian socialists shared.

Such attitudes were not shared however by the Trades Unionists - the pristine Labourites - who were the product of industrial capitalism, urbanisation and of political democracy. They, as a powerful producer group, wanted to take part in the political process by the exercise of their industrial and economic power. The establishment of the right to free collective bargaining certainly ensured that they shaped economic decisions taken both by government and private industry. Therefore trade union leaders acquired a healthy respect for power, especially that embodied in state power. Political power then was something to be used for the furtherance of trade union interests or indeed 'national interests' which union leaders regarded as synonomous with working class interests. The organic relationship between the trade unions and the Labour Party created the phenomenon of so-called cultural Labourism (which is discussed

[1] See 'What is Socialism' by G.D. Cole who distinguishes four sorts of socialism - utopian, scientific, anarchist and evolutionary in Ideologies of Politics, op. cit., p. 16.

[2] Op. cit., p.84.

later). These attitudes when translated into the area of international politics became powerful arguments in favour of national power which if necessary should be built-up and used for the pursuit of national interests. Mr. Ernest Bevin's rejection of pacifism at the Labour Party conference in 1935[1] was the fore-runner of Labour's commitment to collective security or even national self-defence which after the Second World War led to the Attlee government's commitment to NATO. Between 1935 and 1949 the Labour Party - or at least the majority of its parliamentary leaders - passed through a utopian to a realist phase in the party's historic evolution in relation to international politics. Future Labour governments would construct a foreign policy based upon perceived national interests. The rhetoric of party conference and the language of socialism together with the idealism of internationalism were down-graded or retained merely as declaratory principles only. The Labour leadership became committed to the maintenance or indeed expansion of British power in the service of traditional goals of state-power - that is, the achievement of national security, economic prosperity and the maintenance of the values of social democracy (based on the assumption that Britain has ceased to be merely a liberal-democracy and had become a social democracy after 1918 but especially after the introduction of the Welfare State in the wake of the second World War). However such state orientated attitudes carrying with them the suppressed premise that the mixed-economy was what Labour had wanted to create and sustain, were open to challenge by another influential group within the Labour Party.[2] This group were the heirs to the so-called 'scientific'

[1] See Bullock, Alan, Ernest Bevin, Vol. I, p. 567.

[2] The Fabian influence within the Labour Party, though greatly exaggerated, certainly encouraged the use of the ballot box and the development of the ideals of social democracy. The Fabian Essays published in 1889 revealed a somewhat insular concern for domestic politics. The Fabian Society did not show much interest in international politics until after the Second World War. See Cole, Margaret, The Story of Fabian Socialism.

socialists - the marxist-socialist tradition who represented those committed to a class-war theory of politics.[1] The marxists were conscious of power, in fact they thought of nothing else. They saw power in its widest sense as a factor to be acquired from those who possessed it, and they therefore regarded state-power as that embodied in the dominance of one class over another. The state was seen as an instrument of class oppression. The capture of the state, in the name of the oppressed masses, would require a power struggle but not one involving overt use of violence. To Labour's marxists that power struggle was to take the form of a parliamentary contest for power won through the ballot box and not by manning the barricades. This analysis of the class struggle was based upon the central assumption that the course of history was determined finally by the forces of economic development. But as G. D. H. Cole once contended the "economic conception of history is equally reconcilable with an evolutionary, or gradualist conception of social development. There is nothing contrary to logic in supposing that, as economic conditions change, political and social conditions change with them gradually, and not by revolutionary upheaval".[2] Labour's parliamentary marxists from the *Keep Left* to the *Tribune Group* were evolutionary socialists rather than revolutionaries and were never indifferent to the notion of power.[3] The power-struggle was the name of the game. They saw perfectly easily that inter-state relations had to be conducted on the basis of power-politics. Their interest in a socialist foreign policy was seen as part of a wider strategy to change the nature of international politics and

[1] See, for example, Eric Heffer's book, The class struggle in Parliament, Gollancz, 1973 for a Marxist analysis of Labour Politics.

[2] op. cit. p. 93.

[3] See, for example, a left-wing economic strategy set out in Keeping Left, New Statesman pamphlet, 1950, which emphasizes the need to transform the liberal-democratic state into a socialist-collectivist society.

to shape a new world order based upon appropriate economic foundations which would then pre-determine the nature of the world-wide political super-structure. That political superstructure would inevitably arise upon the basis of an essentially non-market economy. But in practice Labour's Left-wing, whether Marxist or not, accepted the mixed economy and argued that the extension of public ownership did not imply an increase in state monopolies. "It is clear to the serious student of modern politics", wrote Mr. Aneurin Bevin in 1952, "that a mixed economy is what most people of the West would prefer".[1] But Labour's marxists could still agree with Richard Crossman's contention made in April 1959 that overall advantage of state ownership and planning had been demonstrated in the case of the Soviet Union. Mr. Crossman wrote in a Fabian pamphlet that "in terms of military power, of industrial development, of technological advance, of mass literacy and, eventually, of mass consumption too, the planned Socialist economy, as exemplified in the Communist states, is proving its capacity to outpace and overtake the wealthy and uncomfortable Western economies".[2] This prediction proved over-elaborate, but, as far as Labour's Left-wing was concerned, it also perhaps appeared to point towards what Crossman further argued was an eventual Communist victory in the cold war. He stressed that "It is possible to predict with a good deal of assurance that, unless and until there is a fundamental change in the structure of our modern managed capitalism, the peaceful competition which has now began between East and West must result in a series of Communist successes".[3] The case for an expansion of public ownership and of state control of the economy

[1] Bevan, Aneurin, In Place of Fear, Heinman, 1952, pp. 118-119.

[2] Crossman, Richard, Socialism and the New Despotism, Fabian Tract, 1956, pp. 16-17.

[3] op. cit., p.20.

became also the case for survival, if not victory, in the cold war struggle between totalitarian communism and democratic socialism. As Crossman argued, a major transfer of ownership, by whatever means, was the central need if the West was to prevail. He ponderously concluded that "We can predict with mathematical certainty that, as long as the public sector remains the minority sector throughout the Western World, we are bound to be defeated in every kind of peaceful competition which we undertake with the Russians".[1] This led to Crossman's prediction that "when the trend of world development becomes clear and the Communist victories are undeniable, a deep revulsion will set in ..... and anger will replace complacency".[2] The Left-wing of the Labour Party saw a connection between domestic economic strategy, the question of economic ownership and social justice - which were in their thinking inseparably linked - and success or failure in the Cold War which would be won by those states with valid and popularly supported democratic regimes. Labour's marxist Left, then, were conscious of state power both in the context of domestic and inter-state politics.

The third ideological grouping within the Labour Party centred on what Stephen Hasler has described as 'cultural Labourism', a portmanteau term to cover an essentially anti-intellectual populism with its emphasis upon movements rather than parties.[3] This cultural Labourism was a synthesis of "patriotism, anti-communism and working class power and interest".[4] Clearly given these tendencies, Labourism favoured a marked national foreign policy, alliance with America, a European commitment (but not a

[1] op. cit., p.23.

[2] op. cit., p.26.

[3] Ionescu, Ghita, and Gellner, Ernest, Populism, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1969, in which chapter 7 by Peter Wiles deals with Labour's populists and their influence.

[4] Haseler, Stephen. The Death of British Democracy, Elek, 1976, p.137.

supranational involvement) and the commonwealth connexion. Cultural Labourism was even somewhat chauvanistic, insular and decidedly populist if not reactionary when defining 'national interests'. Indeed Labourites like Gunter, Mellish, Brown and Callaghan had little difficulty in talking about the 'national interest', which is a concept that academics tend to treat with analytical distain - and not without reason (see below). Labourites put nation before class, capitalism before socialism (whatever meaning this latter term had for such an anti-intellectual approach), instinct and intuition before theory, and, finally, displayed a virulent anti-totalitarian and therefore anti-communist ethos. Labour under this influence was a party of King and country in both world wars and loyal to working class interests. Ernest Bevin embodied these virtues and a few beside. His rugged commitment to certain basic but ill-defined principles was central to cultural Labourism. He was always more than a trade union leader but something less than an ideologue.[1] He reflected what Haseler has called "the magic formula for British Labourism" which embodied nationalism, anti-socialism and working class power".[2] The Labourists were not neutral in the cold war and never shared the ambition to form a 'Third Force' between 'capitalism' and 'Communism'. That aspiration lay with the utopian and scientific socialists within the party but it remained an aspiration totally alien to the cultural Labourites and their trade union colleagues (or brothers as they were called). The Labourites were not averse to taking power through a parliamentary majority or even to governing with a minority of the seats in

[1] See 'Private View of Ernest Bevin', John Bull, 17 August 1946 for a brief discussion of his political and personal characteristics.

[2] op. cit., p.138.

the commons if necessary and they considered Labour governments just as concerned with upholding the nation's interests as the Tories, indeed they could be more successful than the Tories because they were closer to and more representative of the common people. Peter Wiles contends that populism therefore expresses the conviction that virtue rests with the simple people, who are the overwhelming majority.[1]

The fourth ideological grouping was composed of the social democrats who were also conscious of political power and in the post-war period were the elegant advocates of winning electoral power; and who, in the international field, found NATO a more realistic device for collective self-defence than the illusory pursuit of collective security through the United Nations. The so-called "revisionists", the Gaitskellites, were also disposed to acknowledge the basic "ethnicity" of the average Labour voter. It is arguable that revisionism took over from Labourism in the mid-fifties following the publication of two seminal publications, *The Future of Socialism* by Anthony Crosland, and *Contemporary Capitalism* by John Strachey.[2] The post-Attlee combination of party leadership - a shift to right of centre - marked Labour's acceptance of the realities of power politics. 'National interests' were paramount both as a concept and as a practical political goal. The traditional socialist commitment to internationalism stretching from pre-1914 days was greatly qualified. And under the influence of Hugh Gaitskill and his close supporters, particularly that of Denis Healey (see below), the Labour Party faced and indeed removed a basic contradiction in its declaratory foreign policy that had lain at the heart of the party's inter-war foreign policy which hung like a great shadow over the post-war 'realist' phase of its declaratory policy.

[1] Populism, op. cit., Chapter 7.

[2] Crosland, Anthony. The Future of Socialism, Jonathan Cape, 1956 and Strachey, John, Contemporary Capitalism, Gollancz 1956.

This related to the rejection of the balance of power - hence the bitter opposition to rearmament in the thirties - and the simultaneous commitment by the party to the doctrine of collective security - which was at once a more nebulous concept.[1] Also, the revisionists within the party questioned the relevance of proletarian internationalism. They accepted the logic that "the view that a certain section of society is naturally internationalist is plausible only when it is asserted before that section of society has achieved power" but "once they rise to power at home, they inherit the concerns for the state's power abroad".[2] Labour's revisionists could agree with Rupert Emerson that the ethnic group was "the terminal community - the largest communities that, when the chips are down, effectively commands men's loyalties, overriding the claims of both the lesser communities within it and those that cut across it within a still greater society".[3] The nation to the Labour voter, contended the revisionists, was prior to class. George Orwell believed working class people are "patriotic because more than any other group they have a vested interest in the nation since they cannot easily leave it".[4] Chief amongst the revisionists in the area of foreign and defence policies was a former marxist, Denis Healey. His career, his attitude and general analysis constitutes the core of the revisionist view of Labour's post-Bevinite foreign policy.[5] In order to establish the nature of that policy, and its basic rationale, we need to look rather more closely at Denis Healey's own career because he points up the new realism inherent in the attitude of Labour's parliamentary leadership. His

[1] See general discussion of this concept in Pick, Otto & Critchley, Julian, Collective Security, Macmillan, 1974, pp. 25-37.

[2] Bull, Hedley. The Anarchical Society, Macmillan, 1976, p.246.

[3] Emerson, Robert. From Empire to Nation, Oxford Univ. Press, 1962, pp.95-6.

[4] Quoted in The Death of British Democracy, op. cit. p.47.

[5] See discussion in Denis Healey and the Policies of Power, by Williams, Geoffrey and Reed, Bruce, Sidgewick and Jackson, 1970.

general analysis was widely shared by Hugh Gaitskill, George Brown, Roy Jenkins, Harold Wilson and Tony Crosland - with Richard Crossman offering no real dissent except in regard to detail and nuance. Also his attitude to the east of Suez role reflected an inconsistency characteristic of the party as a whole. His six years as Secretary of the International Department of the British Labour Party, which began in January 1946, gave him a good understanding of politics and politicians.[1]

The new Labour Government was also coming to grips with reality. The Second World War had left Britain victorious, but exhausted. Some of the limitations of British power had become apparent on 15 February 1942, when more than 100,000 Allied troops had surrendered to a Japanese force less than half its size at Singapore.[2] This Far Eastern stronghold had had £60 million spent on making it impregnable - but its 15-inch guns pointed out to sea. It was ill-prepared for the landward invasion.

The war had made worse Britain's relatively declining economic position.[3] The problems of major industries in danger - engineering, shipping and textiles - and the demands of new light industries for skills and capital were worsened by growing competition from developing nations and the rapid pace of change. Britain's capacity to trade and manufacture were hit. She lost almost a third of her merchant shipping; more than five million houses were destroyed or damaged; much of her overseas investment had been sold to pay for the war effort.[4] Victory over Hitler and the Japanese hid the reality of her economic exhaustion.

1 Mr Healey did not take up his post until 1946: he was appointed in November 1945.

2 Leasor, James, Singapore, pp. 1-22.

3 Pollard, Sydney, The Development of the British Economy, 1914-50.

4 Calder, Angus. The People's War, p. 17.

The new mood of the nation, however, eager for changes towards greater social justice and economic reconstruction, gave Labour a landslide victory, with 393 seats to the Conservatives' 213, and a mandate for their Five Year Plan.[1]

Ernest Bevin's foreign policy was dominated by the need to find new sources of power, to drop any responsibilities considered inessential, and to encourage the United States, as an ally, to pick up the burden. Healey watched from close range. He was appointed International Secretary of the Labour Party on 29th November 1945.

When Healey first entered the square room on the sixth floor of Transport House, his windows overlooked a dismal courtyard and a fire escape. It was a desolate setting, made more so by the near collapse of any organization.[2] Willie Gillies, the previous Secretary, had resigned a year earlier. Gillies had recognized the nature of German and Soviet imperialism in the 1930s, and written *Solar System* and *Finnish War* to expose it. Idealistic left-wingers like Laski never forgave him.[3]

As part of his job to re-establish links with European socialist parties, and to help form a new Socialist International, Healey toured fraternal conferences in West and East Europe till the Iron Curtain came down.

'I was committed to the Social Democrats in Europe.' he said. 'As soon as I came into contact with the problem I began to see the difference between them and the Communists. I thought at first that we could do business with the Soviet Union, but I became more and more depressed - particularly in 1947 and '48 when the Socialist parties in Eastern Europe were being eliminated.'[4]

[1] Williams, F. Fifty Years' March: The Rise of the Labour Party.

[2] Denis Healey and the Policies of Power, op. cit., p.54.

[3] ibid.

[4] ibid.

Bevin's growing disillusionment with the Soviet Union was aptly reflected in Healey's pamphlet of May 1947 - *Cards on the Table*.[1] It was a pamphlet that nearly split the Party, for it went much further than Bevin was able to go publicly, although, as Healey's colleagues said, it was his idea, and not Bevin's. He was well in touch with Foreign Office opinion at the time, however, having frequent contact with Bevin and Hector McNeil, his Minister of State, as well as the civil servants.

Cards on the Table argued that Britain had to reduce commitments because of her declining resources, yet in an orderly manner so as not to lose control over the process, or her power and initiative. It savagely attacked the way Russia's 'attempt to destroy Britain's freedom of initiative was double-edged' and clearly argued that the Soviet Union represented the biggest danger to Britain, while America - seemingly unwilling to shoulder the burdens and responsibilities of power - had to be encouraged to give up her desire for isolationism.

The Left especially were horrified at the clear tones in which Healey stated that 'Britain could not under any circumstances adopt a policy which might lead her to war against America', and added 'we can only be greateful if America is prepared in any way to make it easier for us to defend our security.'[2] The pamphlet greeted the way Bevin had encouraged the Americans to help the British prop up certain regimes in Europe as a triumph - a presence which the left did not appreciate. Between capitalist America and communist Russia, he asserted, 'democratic socialism will only survive as an alternative if Labour Britain survives as a world power.'[3]

[1] Healey, Denis. Cards on the Table, International Department publication, the Labour Party, May 1947, p. 15.

[2] ibid.

[3] ibid.

When *Cards on the Table* was put before the Executive at the Margate Party Conference there was tremendous opposition, led by Laski, supported by Richard Crossman. As Francis Mennell said: 'Although Laski and Denis thought in similar terms in 1945, by 1947 they were arguing about almost everything.'[1] The problem was compounded by the prejudice among some leading Labour Party politicians who thought that the research department for international affairs was a waste of members' money. This in itself made it difficult to put through documents on foreign policy.

The fall of Czechoslovakia brought a change in the Labour Party's attitude to the Soviet Union and the menace of Communism. Healey did not succeed in getting a much more active policy adopted by Labour Party leaders, who became bogged down in the Korean War in June 1950. To compensate for this perhaps, he edited *The Curtain Falls*,[2] which was a clear condemnation of the Soviet Union and its methods of taking control in Eastern European states.

He had difficulty in persuading Aneurin Bevan to write the introduction, for, although he was extremely anti-Communist and had many friends among the refugees, he had just split with the official leadership of the party, and needed the support of the Left, who were more sympathetic to the Soviet Union. Bevan didn't mince his words, however, and wrote: 'It is a grim, depressing narrative.... The Communist Party is the sworn inveterate enemy of the Socialist and Democratic Parties. The Communist does not look upon a Socialist as an ally in a common cause. He looks upon him as a dupe, as a temporary convenience, and as something to be thrust relentlessly to one side when he has served his purpose.'[3]

[1] Denis Healey and the Policies of Power, op. cit., p. 61.

[2] Healey, Denis, The Curtain Falls, International Department of the Labour Party, 1950, p.1.

[3] ibid.

Healey played a vital part in drawing up the *Aims and Tasks of Democratic Socialism* the importance of which, as one prominent socialist philosopher stated, 'can be compared only to the Inaugural Address of the International Working Men's Association in London in 1864'.[1]

The International Socialist Conference held in Copenhagen on 1-3 June 1950, set up a sub-committee to prepare a declaraction on the basic principles of democratic socialism common to all party members. The sub-committee had representatives of Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Britain, Scandanavia, Switzerland, and Eastern Europe, and was nominally under the chairmanship of Guy Mollet, although Solomon Gumbach, another Frenchman, exercised this role in practice. It met in Paris in October 1950, in London in March 1951, and in Strasbourg in May 1951, before a final meeting in Frankfurt in June 1951.

Four drafts were elaborated before the final one was submitted to the Socialist International, meeting at Frankfurt during 30 June - 3 July. Two of the five sections were written by Healey. He wrote the preamble, and, when Grumbach's draft for the section on 'International Democracy' proved inadequate, he wrote that too. The full meeting of the foundation Congress of the new Socialist International unanimously accepted the 'charter' that Healey had done so much to mould.

In the Declaration, Healey wrote of the evils of capitalism.

'Socialism aims to liberate the peoples from dependence on a minority which owns or controls the means of production,'[2] he said. But he also attacked Communism which falsely claimed a share in the socialist tradition. He continued:

[1] Remark made to author by Crosland and quoted in Denis Healey and the Policies of Power, op. cit., p. 69.

[2] Declaration of Socialist Principles, Frankfurt, June 1951.

'Communism has split the International Labour Movement and has set back the realization of Socialism in many countries for decades. It has distorted that tradition beyond recognition. It has built up a rigid theology which is incompatible with the critical spirit of Marxism.

'Where Socialists aim to achieve freedom and justice by removing the exploitation which divides men under capitalism, Communists seek to sharpen those class divisions only in order to establish the dictatorship of a single party. International Communism is the instrument of a new imperialism.'

Socialists who built their faith on Marxist and other methods of analysing society, he wrote, 'all strive for the same goal - a system of social justice, better living, freedom and world peace'. [1]

The final section emphasized the international nature of the socialist movement, and thundered: 'Absolute national sovereignty must be transcended.' [2]

After speaking of the need for socialists to help overcome extreme poverty, illiteracy, and disease throughout the world, he continued:

'Democratic Socialists recognise the maintenance of world peace as the supreme task in our time. Peace can be secured only by a system of collective security. This will create the conditions for international disarmament..... The struggle for world peace is inseparably bound up with the struggle for freedom. It is the threat to the independence of free peoples that is directly responsible for the danger of war in our time.' [3]

The Soviet threat to economically weak nations was the major preoccupation of Western statesmen in the late forties. Bevin set about

[1] ibid.

[2] ibid.

[3] ibid.

drawing the United States into an alliance that would protect the integrity of the West European states. Healey supported him ardently. His strong pro-Americanism dates from 1948.

Like many of Healey's firmly held beliefs it was not emotionally conceived. As Adam Ciolcosz stated: 'He is not that kind of man. He simply does his sums and puts two and two together.' He added: 'I think Denis contributed very much to the military thing against the Soviets. If they were not to be trusted, then you had to defend the rest of Europe - and the U.S.A. was necessary for the defence of Europe.'[1]

Healey confirmed that 'basically I was an Atlantic Community man from about 1948'.[2]

For Transport House the Cold War dated from the coup in Czechoslovakia, and the flow of refugees who came in and out all day long. Bevin saw the essential problem, Healey explained, 'as committing the Americans to the protection and economic support of Western Europe before we accepted any more responsibilities in Europe'. He added: 'The only time we went ahead of events was with the Dunkirk Treaty, but that was definitely the sprat to catch the whale of NATO.'[3]

The Dunkirk Treaty, concluded between Britain and France in March 1947, was for mutual defence against aggression by Germany - occupied at that time by the Allies. It symbolized the re-emergence of France as a European power, and led, in March 1948, to the Brussels Treaty, which promised 'all the military and other aid and assistance in their power' to any of the signatories (Belgium, Britain, France, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands) if they were the object of armed attack.[4] When the arrangement

[1] Denis Healey and the Policies of Power, op. cit., p.71.

[2] ibid.

[3] ibid.

[4] Pick, Otto and Citchley, Julian, Collective Security, p. 40.

ended in May 1955 it was replaced by the expanded Western European Union, which included Italy and the German Federal Republic.[1]

Healey watched while Bevin, 'a master of timing', which he learned as a trade union negotiator, brought America out of isolation and into the defence of the free Western European states. The Marshall Plan, to give economic aid to the struggling democracies, was perhaps the highlight of the period. On 5 June 1947, George Marshall, the American Secretary of State, had talked of 'a programme designed to place Europe on its feet economically', and added, 'The initiative, I think, must come from Europe.'[2]

Bevin welcomed the proposal eight days later, on 13th June. 'He had been looking for a chance to catch the Americans on that.' explained Healey. 'The Americans themselves didn't regard the speech made at Harvard as much more than waffling aloud,. but Ernie seized on it as an American "offer" that Europe should respond to.'[3]

The report and plan drawn up by the Europeans for the European Recovery Programme were given to Marshall on 22nd September 1947, and the Organization for European Economic Co-operation (O.E.E.C.) was set up to administer it.

The plan, together with the Brussels Treaty and the stationing of American B29s with atomic bombs in East Anglia in 1948, led to the formal NATO alliance, established on 4th April 1949. This was the first post-war alliance linking the two North American powers to the defence of the Western democracies. Bevin had taken the cold dregs of wartime collaboration and cemented them into a big power relationship.[4] Britain's freedom to act was curtailed by her need for an American prop. Her influence in the world

[1] Ismay, Lord, NATO: The First Five Years 1949-1954, 1954, pp. 20-22.

[2] Denis Healey and the Policies of Power, op. cit., p. 71

[3] ibid.

[4] Denis Healey wrote in 1952 that "the period of Bevin's main achievement was pre-eminently the period of the Big Three, a trinity to which Britain belonged more by prestige and diplomatic skill than by might of power." New Fabian Essays, 1952, p. 172.

would prosper only if she could milk the special relationship with the United States for all it was worth. With the coming of the superpowers the old idea of 'balance of power' diplomacy gave way to 'alliance diplomacy'.[1] It was a new form of diplomacy which Healey could see at close quarters from its inception, and which he was to practice in the 1960s. One contribution to the general spirit of construction was his pamphlet *Feet on the Ground.*[2]

When Denis Healey entered the House of Commons in February 1952 the Labour Party had already begun to tear itself apart publicly over defence and foreign policy in the battles of the fifties and early sixties.

Gaitskell's first Budget, of the 10th April 1951, marked the beginnings of the rift on foreign and defence policy which was to characterize the public's image of the Party. The imposition of charges on teeth and spectacles to help finance the rearmament programme for the Korean War, which had begun in June 1950, was the excuse for Bevan to resign. Slighted in Attlee's appointment of Morrison to Foreign Secretary, and the young Gaitskell as Chancellor of the Exchequer, Bevan resigned from the Cabinet, along with Harold Wilson and John Freeman. The idealistic left now had a leader of stature.

'The main reason why the Labour Cabinet consciously assumed the political handicap of so daunting an arms programme.' said Healey, 'was not so much the belief in its military necessity, but the feeling that unless Britain gave a dramatic and unequivocal pledge of her readiness to lead Europe in building a serious military force on the continent, the United States might not be prepared to make her indispensable contribution.'[3]

Britain needed the threat of America's nuclear power to deter Russia from any attack in Europe.

[1] See Williams, Geoffrey, The Permanent Alliance: The European-American Partnership 1945-1984, 1977, pp.6-7.

[2] Healey, D., Feet on the Ground, Transport House Research Department, 1953.

[3] Denis Healey, op. cit., p. 72.

When Healey entered Parliament the Labour Party had lost power, and its foreign policy was under fire from the Left who demanded a major modification. They regarded the Party as being too committed to the idea of Cold War, and accused it of siding with the forces of capitalism against the international workers' movement led by the Soviet Union. In 1952, in his New Fabian Essay entitled *Power Politics and the Labour Party*, Healey emerged as the major contributor to the 'power-political' school of thinking on foreign and defence policy in the Party.[1]

Healey argued for a strong American commitment through NATO, rejecting the idea of a 'socialist foreign policy'. The Bevanites had to be tolerated because as 'the Party as a whole lacks any systematic theory of world affairs, it has often fallen victim to the besetting sin of all progressive opposition - Utopianism.'[2] Healey soon became a leader of the 'realists' fighting against 'Utopians' who believed that Britain had to join the side of the workers in the international class war.

'It's very difficult to get everybody to see that, if you want to stop anarchy and get peace, then you have to have some way of making states stick to the rules'.[3]

Healey attacked the Party for its lack of a coherent view of the world. In New Fabian Essays he admitted that the critical influences on the Party's thinking on world affairs came 'from the Liberal-nonconformist wing, with its bias towards pacifism, and the neo-Marxist wing, stemming

[1] See Healey, Denis, New Fabian Essay, 1952, pp. 161-174.

[2] op. cit., p.162.

[3] Denis Healey and the Policies of Power, op. cit, p.

from continental Social Democracy and Communism.'[1] Characteristically he suggested that Party members seriously interested in foreign policy should read Hobbes' *Leviathan* rather than Fabian or Party literature.

Denis Healey contended that "an understanding of the power element in politics is the first necessity for a sound foreign policy. The trade union movement as the other main contributor to British socialism, can still, as so often in the past, go some way towards filling this gap in Fabian theory. But the trade union movement is even more afflicted by parochialism, and it tends to intervene in the formation of foreign policy to correct errors rather than to give positive direction.

The major positive influences on Labour Party thinking about world affairs have come from neither the Fabians nor the trade unions, but from the liberal-Nonconformist wing with its bias towards pacifism, and the neo-Marxist wing, stemming from continental Social Democracy and Communism." [2]

Healey's essays, and articles in the magazine *Socialist Commentary*, established him as the major intellectual force behind collective security. Like other right-wing intellectuals Healey believed that the important thing about international politics was their anarchical nature - as in *Leviathan* only a strong world government could bring peace and order to the state of nature where every country was intent on doing anything that it considered best for it. Other writers in the magazine agreed with Healey that with the lack of world government ideology was almost irrelevant.[3]

[1] New Fabian Essays, op. cit., p. 161.

[2] ibid., p. 163.

[3] Dr. Rita Hinden the editor of Socialist Commentary encouraged a more empirical approach to politics from her regular contributors like Anthony Crosland and Roy Jenkins, etc.

Bevin as Foreign Minister had built his policy on alliance with the United States and opposition to Soviet expansion. Healey, together with other intellectuals like Strachey, Younger, Mayhew and Crosland, provided the intellectual backing for such polcies. Healey, in particular, besides attacking the Left for being utopian also accused it of tending to 'discount the power element in politics, seeing it as a specific evil of the existing system rather than a generic characterstic of politics as such.'[1] Of Utopians, Healey said, the liberal ones thought that left to themselves men would act for the common interest, and the marxists overestimated economic factors, believing that evil stemmed from bad property relations.

'In both cases', argued Healey, 'deprecation of the power factor entails an inadequate understanding of the techniques of power.'[2]

The Left did not really understand that foreign policy needed the 'power-political' approach instead of wishful thinking about good intentions of other states. This argument Healey pressed with vigour.

"For the utopian," wrote Healey, "Heaven is always round the corner, every evil has a single cause and thus a single cure - there is always 'One Way Only'. Socialist attitudes to war provide many examples. Esperanto has always been popular among socialists on the grounds that nations would cease to fight one another if they all spoke the same language. Though war is at least 3,000 years older than capitalism, many socialists believe believe that capitalism is the only cause of war, and that therefore the Soviet Union could not commit aggression because it has a 'socialist' economy. Others maintain that the only serious danger of war springs from disparities between the living standards of the

[1] op. cit., p. 162.

[2] ibid.

[3] ibid., pp. 162-163.

peoples; yet it is difficult to find a single war in modern times which was caused primarily by such disparities." [1]

The Bevanites in the mid-fifties were growing in strength in the constituency parties and in leftist unions such as the Electrical Trades Union and the Amalgamated Engineers. In *Tribune* and the *New Statesman* Bevanite journalists attacked the right wing. At the 1952 Party Conference at Morecambe they gained six of the seven constituencey places on the Executive, with Crossman and Wilson ousting veterans Dalton and Morrison.[2]

At the conference, Mendelson gave a classic statement of the Left's attitude to foreign affairs which he said: 'We can best serve the cause of peace by sticking to our distinctive socialist principles and refusing to subordinate them to American, Russian or any other pressures.'[3]

With its view that socialism was somehow midway between the ideologies of capitalism and communism the Left tended towards neutralism, and were opposed by Healey, who thought British interests lay closer to the Americans, and that neutrality or the creation of a 'third force' would alter the balance of power in the world.

Healey decided to attack Bevan and the left-wing analysis of foreign policy as a 'dream for escapists'. The volatile state of Party policy was matched by the delegates, since most of them had been mandated to oppose German rearmament. Healey had decided to expose the Bevanites as advancing irrelevant and tendentious arguments by mounting

[1] New Fabian Essays, op. cit., pp. 162-163.

[2] Labour Party Conference Report 1952, p. 145.

[3] ibid., p. 221. John Mendelson was a Labour M.P.

a frontal assault on the idol of the Left, the imposing Bevan himself. Healey accused Bevan of reducing debate to the level of 'a diet of candyfloss', urged him to face up to the realities of foreign policy, and called upon delegates to throw away the 'stale mythology of Peter Pans'. Britain must work with America, accept German rearmament, and seek to keep the Commonwealth together, he said.[1]

In the 1952 Labour Party pamphlet *Problems of Foreign Policy* Healey wrote: 'The security of Europe against Russian attack and German domination depends on America being permanently involved on the Continent.'[2]

This remained the core of his policy throughout the fifties.

Healey fought continually with the extreme Left of his Party, whose antipathy to the American social system led it to react against Labour's foreign policy. In *Britain and Europe* he had argued that there was an organic unity between all non-Communist forces against the U.S.S.R. and her allies.[3] In *The Defence of Western Europe* he argued for an expenditure of ten per cent of the gross national product by Britain on the defence of Europe against Russian expansion.[4] And at a Fabian Conference in 1951 he argued that an anti-American posture by Britain would either make America isolationist or would encourage her to ally with even more right-wing governments in Europe as the basis of her foreign policy.[5]

The other reasons why Britain needed an alliance with the Americans, he said, were to help solve the Russian problem, to find answers to the problems of German rearmament and demilitarization, to hold the

[1] Op. cit., pp. 191-192.

[2] Quoted in Denis Healey and the Policies of Power, op. cit. pp. 113-114.

[3] Labour Party Publication, Research Department, 1951.

[4] Labour Party Publication, Research Department, 1950.

[5] Denis Healey and the Policies of Power, op. cit., p.114.

Commonwealth together, and to help Britain and under-developed countries on economic issues.

In a November 1953 debate in the Commons he clearly showed he had come to terms with the declining power of Britain: 'I am very proud to be an unrepentant Bevinite,' he said, referring to the man who had done most to get NATO established. He spoke of the two basic principles of British foreign policy; the first being the alliance 'to build up a new community of like-minded nations' and the second 'to re-organize the whole basis of Britain's international position so that it rests not on force, but on consent.'[1]

In a nutshell: 'Interdependence replaces an independent foreign policy.'[2]

In July 1955, in an article in the *News Chronicle* he defended NATO as the means whereby peace was guaranteed, and emphasized that it was a political as well as military alliance.[3]

In his book, *Neutralism*, published in the same year, 1955, he attacked the left-wing dislike of alliance: 'Neutralism,' he wrote, 'based upon the belief that Socialists should stand midway between Communist Russia and Capitalist America, is faulty, not only in its vision of the Soviet System as in some way Socialist..... Indeed this type of Neutralism depends essentially on the argument that there is nothing to choose between a little of a bad thing, and a great deal of a bad thing.'[4] He stressed the need for a definite stand against Soviet expansion as being necessary in any step towards an international society.[5]

1 Op. cit., p. 114.

2 ibid.

3 The News Chronicle July 12, 1955.

4 Op. cit., p. 114-115.

5 See final chapter for brief discussion of Labour's view of the nature of international society.

This was typical of his attacks on the Left,and more precisely, the Communists. In the *Daily Herald*, in October 1952, he had emphasized clearly just how anti- Communist he had become, when he wrote: 'It thrives on betrayal', and listed Communist spies recently captured, including Klaus Fuchs and Allan Nunn May.

'A good Communist cannot be a good patriot', wrote the fresh-thinking Healey. 'Every Communist is a potential traitor - though of course, a great many do not realize the sinister implications of the movement they have joined, and would undoubtedly leave it if they did so.'[1]

In 1955 he warned that a summit meeting might bring about a weakening of NATO and the Anglo-American alliance that was essential to British interests. When in January 1956 he wrote *When Shrimps learn to Whistle: Thoughts after Geneva*, he summed up the Communist threat: 'The main aims of Soviet foreign policy, as defined by Soviet leaders themselves, remain unchanged - to get Germany out of NATO, to get NATO out of Europe, and to persuade the West to abolish all nuclear weapons while leaving conventional forces in being.'[2]

But Healey's anti-Communism and pro-NATO position did not prevent him from producing the Party's most novel foreign policy suggestion of the fifties - disengagement.

The idea of 'disengagement' in central Europe was not entirely new. It had been discussed in 1952, and M. Paul Van Zeeland, a former Belgian Foreign Minister, advocated it in 1953. German strategists like Colonel von Bonin, Dr. Pfleiderer, and Albert Weinstein had also suggested some

[1] Daily Herald, October 6th 1952.

[2] Op. cit., p. 115.

kind of militarily neutral and politically independent area as the only way in which Germany might be reunited.[1] Even Sir Anthony Eden had suggested the possibility of a demilitarized zone at the 1955 Geneva Conference - but his insistence that this would be conditional on free elections and unfettered government in Germany made this a non-starter.

The Gaitskell/Healey Plan, however (which Healey devised) was better thought-out. It had its origins in the brutal Soviet invasion of Hungary. This event perhaps made Healey more interested in the political freedom of Eastern Europe than in the military security of Europe as a whole.

Out of his belief that the status quo was intolerable came his pamphlet *A Neutral Belt in Europe* which was published in January 1958.[2] The *Daily Telegraph* grudgingly admitted that this reduced a 'hitherto vague and nebulous concept to fairly precise and manageable terms'.[3]

With the Soviet invasion of Hungary, and the first Soviet sputnik launched in 1957, the West was becoming increasingly alarmed that another possible Soviet move could be followed, for example, by West German retaliation that might lead to global war. Healey therefore devised a plan that he hoped would lead to a neutral belt in central Europe, with the NATO and Warsaw Pact armies no longer facing each other across a border.

Healey had high hopes for the plan. M. Rapacki, the Polish Foreign Minister, proposed a nuclear-free zone for central Europe at the end of 1957. Professor George Kennan, former State Department specialist in Russian affairs and U.S. Ambassador to Moscow, supported the broad idea of

[1] See Eugene Hinterhoff, Disengagement in Europe, 1959, pp. 414-42.

[2] Healey, Denis, A Neutral Belt in Europe, Fabian Tract, 1958.

[3] The Daily Telegraph, January 5th 1958.

disengagement in the B.B.C.'s Reith Lectures. At the Labour Party Conference in October 1958 a resolution was passed urging the peaceful reunification of Germany within the framework of a European Security Pact.

Healey was a front bench supporter of Gaitskell when the ban-the-bomb debate split the Party. In March 1960 Healey's New Fabian pamphlet *The Race Against the H-bomb* was published one day after forty-four Labour left-wingers, including Crossman and Wigg, had abstained in the defence debate because of Gaitskell's support of nuclear weapons.[1] Healey emphasized that the anxiety of NATO members to get their own nuclear weapons was undermining the alliance, as well as drawing America into isolation. It was a typical example of the statesman Healey looking beyond the frontiers of Britain to see the wider implications of British policy.

The debate about nuclear weapons had been going on inside the Party from about 1955, when a resolution to oppose the manufacture of the H-bomb was defeated at the annual conference by some five votes to one.[2]

By 1957 it regretted 'the undue dependence on the ultimate deterrent', although there was still a 5,000,000 majority at the Brighton Conference in favour of continued manufacture of the bomb.[3] The right-wing trade union support for the Executive ensured that three similar resolutions at the 1958 Conference met the same fate.[4] Gaitskell's attack on Clause Four after the 1959 election, however, lost him this

[1] Healey, Denis, The Race Against the H-Bomb, Fabian Tract No. 522, 1960.

[2] See Labour Party Conference Report for 1955, p. 121

[3] See Labour Party Conference Report for 1957, p. 86

[4] See Labour Party Conference Report for 1958, p. 97

support; the unions were determined to uphold a traditional commitment.

Gaitskell, unwilling to diminish the power of his possible future job, defended Britain's independent nuclear capability because of 'excessive dependence on the United States'. Britain might wish to act independently of America against the Soviet Union, he argued. This gave Britain influence in world affairs, and bargaining power. Unilateral disarmament, argued the 'realist' right-wingers, was only a moral gesture which would have no effect on other powers.

George Wigg, who became obsessed with the excessive reliance on nuclear weapons that he thought had been imposed on Britain by the Sandys White Paper on Defence of 1957, and left-winger Richard Crossman drew attention to the difference of opinion between Gaitskell and Healey. They demanded that conventional forces should be strengthened at the expense of the nuclear deterrent.

They were joined by the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, an organization supported by Christian pacifists, left-wingers, communists, and large numbers of the idealistic youth of the country. Healey himself had been at the meeting of a small group of friends - Kingsley Martin, John Collins, J. B. Priestley and his wife, and George Kennan - who had got together to discuss nuclear problems. Out of this C.N.D. had started. Healey and Kennan did not join. As Robert Taylor has written: "In an age of so-called consensus politics, the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament provided a dramatic and colourful diversion."[1]

Healey criticized the C.N.D. movement 'because they tended to argue that we mustn't think rationally about force, which is the beginning of evil'. He adds: 'It was the precursor of the hippy movement, and the anti-political movement among the young.'[2]

[1] Taylor, R., 'The Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament,' in The Age of Affluence, p. 221.

[2] Denis Healey and the Policies of Power, op. cit., p. 124-125.

The right-wing of the Party regarded it as a truism to talk of nuclear weapons as being 'evil'. Fred Mulley in *The Politics of Western Defence* and John Strachey in *On the Prevention of War* argued that the moral force of the argument against nuclear war hindered people from looking properly at the problems; problems that Healey emphasized could not be ignored in the real world where power is the major factor governing the relationship between states.[1]

With the cancellation of the British Blue Streak missile in April 1960 the case for having an 'independent' deterrent collapsed by default - although the Conservative Party continued to talk of Britain's ability to use nuclear weapons independent of America if necessary. In July 1960 the Labour Executive and the Trades Union Congress accepted the Healey line as official policy.[2] They opposed an independent nuclear weapon for Britain, and called for arms control in central Europe as a step towards disengagement. They demanded less dependence on nuclear weapons in NATO strategy, and called for an agreement to end nuclear tests.

At the Scarborough Conference, where Gaitskell presented the policy, he accused the Left and C.N.D. of being neutralist. Knowing that the big unions were mandated to vote against the policy, he declared that he would not accept the defeat: 'There are some of us who will fight and fight and fight again to save the Party we love.'[3]

Healey spoke out in support, urging Boilermakers' Union leader Ted Hill to be realistic about Krushchev, who was unlikely to be impressed by fine gestures. 'I would like to see Ted Hill going into industrial

[1] See Mulley, Fred, The Politics of Western Defence and Strachey, John, On the Prevention of War, for a discussion of defence problems seen from the realist viewpoint.

[2] Joint statement by Labour Party and the Trades Union Congress April 18, 1960.

[3] Labour Party Conference Report for 1960, p. 217.

negotiations armed with nothing except the purity of his intentions.' he said.[1]

Gaitskell, who saw clearly that 'the issue .... is not really defence at all, but the leadership of this Party' was narrowly defeated by 3,339,000 votes to 3,042,000.[2] When Parliament re-assembled he was re-elected to the leadership with 166 votes to Wilson's 81. It was necessary, however, for Gaitskell and his supporters to regain the confidence of the Party.

Gaitskell received the support of the Campaign for Democratic Socialism (C.D.S.), which was active in the constituencies, unions, and Parliament. Its leaders, through their magazine *Campaign*, supported Gaitskell over almost everything. Healey, and other Shadow Ministers, did not belong to it but used it as a platform and a flag under which they could congregate. The unorganized 'right-wing' sector of the Party backed the official line on defence under C.D.S. leadership. and the unions swung back to Gaitskell.

In 1961 the National Executive had set up a 'Committee of Twelve' to draft a policy document on defence. Of the major drafts, the Healey draft was most committed to the NATO alliance. 'Britain must remain a member of NATO, and seek to reform it from the inside', it said. It added that the Party should 'cease to attempt to remain an independent nuclear power, since this neither strengthens the alliance nor is it a sensible use of our limited resources'. The Healey draft was accepted while Crossman's was rejected, and became the official *Policy for Peace*.[3]

[1] Op. cit., p. 224.

[2] Op. cit. p. 218.

[3] Denis Healey and the Policies of Power, op. cit., p.126.

At the Blackpool Conference in October 1961 the Party rejected unilateralism by 4,526,000 votes to 1,756,000, and overwhelmed a resolution in favour of neutralism by nearly 5,000,000 votes.[1] The debate on the British bomb had been defused.

This brief analysis of revisionist foreign policy as expostulated by Denis Healey, who may be regarded as a representative figure, virtually encapsulates the essence of the social democratic ideology within the Labour Party. The overt commitment to national power also reflected other aspects of Labour's policies which are paralleled in the domestic environment. Internally this 'national'commitment pointed towards the acceptance of group interests whose constant interaction would require institutional control which under the Labour Governments of the mid-sixties led to the tripartite relationship between the Government, the trades unions, and industry. Some would see in this the seeds of the corporate state with its emphasis on national unity and maximization of state power.and the denial of merely private interests over that of the collectivity. Given the eclectic nature of revisionism it was inevitable that the ideology of social democratism would be drawn from many sources. Indeed four distinct origins are discernable in social democratic thought making a strange admixture of thinking drawn from diverse sources, including "Communism, fascism, liberalism and conservatism."[2] Thus we can discern in Labour's domestic and foreign policies the impact of concepts of class, of national economic planning, belief in individual freedom and respect for the institutions of state, particularly those associated with

[1] See Labour Party Conference Report for 1966, p.102

[2] Haseler, Stephen, op. cit., p.153.

parliamentary democracy. These ingredients have given Labour's foreign policy both in opposition and in government (especially strongly in regard to the latter) a distinctly ambivalent nature. It has presented "a popular, if muddled, view of the world".[1] And yet despite Labour's manifest commitment to traditional values and to the need for continuity in foreign policy, the myth still persisted that a Labour government would mean the dismemberment of national power through a policy of unarmed neutrality or pacifism and disarmament. But, of course, the ideology of social democracy pointed firmly in the direction of a protracted clash with the ideology of communism and of Soviet political power in particular. Mr. Attlee's Government from 1945-51 established the essentially 'atlanticist' commitment of the British Labour Party as well as that of the governmental perspective of his cabinet. The ideology expressed by the Labour leadership was to reveal intellectual and emotional attitudes which virtually encapsulated those associated with the so-called cold war liberals. Such sentiments also reflected the overall view of the social-democratic majority in the PLP and of successive Labour cabinets. Inevitably therefore in October 1964 Labour came into office, after 13 years in opposition, with a well-formulated defence policy which emphasized traditional 'national interests' and values. The ideology of socialism was not considered prior to 'national interests'. But 'national interests' were also considered as subordinate to latent internationalism even if this aspect of policy was somewhat suppressed in practice. As John Strachey argued "Britain can serve the cause of peace above all by

[1] Op. cit., p.154.

promoting the emergence of a world authority", to which a Labour government would be committed and that commitment "would in fact constitute an almost revolutionary break with any foreign policy which Britain, or for that matter any other nation, has ever pursued." Strachey recalled that "During the period of the Labour Government of 1945-51, the Prime Minister sent round a minute to all Ministers defining the basic foreign and defence policies which he desired his Government to promote. They were, first, undeviating support of the United Nations and, second, a sustained effort to pursue the goals of international disarmament and peace. It was characteristic of Lord Attlee that he saw no contradiction between such a policy and the steady rebuilding of the power of Britain, both by means of participation in such alliances as NATO and by the creation of British nuclear weapons. Nor do I".[1] Here we see the neat balancing of national with international interests. And it is clear that in regard to 'High Politics', Labour pursued traditional policies based upon 'national interests' whose definition was substantially unaffected by the ideology of democratic-socialism. But some element of the ideology of socialism (as loosely identified in the opening section of this chapter) clearly shaped Labour's foreign and defence policies. However, in the sphere of 'Low Politics', the relevance of ideology was more strongly expressed and felt.[2] Labour found both the internal and external environments difficult to manage but on balance even in a period of economic constraint, the domestic environment gave greater scope for attempts to achieve some of the goals of socialism as defined by the Labour movement since 1918. Nevertheless Labour's defence

[1] Strachey, John, The Pursuit of Peace, Fabian Tract 329, 1960, p.22.

[2] I am using the distinction made by Professor Stanley Hoffman who identified 'High Politics' as concerned with foreign and defence issues and 'Low Politics' as essentially those concerned with social and domestic issues.

and foreign policies were not devoid of ideological influence derived from the syndrome of socialism. And in fact Labour's enormously ambitious defence programme which the party had painfully built-up in Opposition, especially between 1960-1964, contained a number of serious ideological and strategic contradictions. The decision to withdraw from East of Suez did not arise in the event solely from economic exigency but from those contradictions within the policy itself which events forced to the surface in 1966 and beyond.

Finally, Labour's policy declarations, resolutions and ministerial statements often refer to 'national interests' or specifically to 'the national interest'. I shall use both terms where necessary, although it is not implied that either term has a specific meaning or even any meaning at all.[1] However it is generally left to the government of the day to decide to which particular national interests it seeks to attach importance.

[1] See discussion of this concept in Frankel, Joseph, The National Interest, 1970; Frankel observes that "the concept of national interest is usually seen as lacking in differentiated content, when it should be seen as containing a number of different functions. N.I. = N.I. should be N.I. = a + b + c + d .... + n, where N.I. is the concept of national interest and a to n are its different functions". pp. 42-3.

CHAPTER II

DEFENCE POLICY: THE TRADITIONAL POSTURE 1945-1964 - THE BI-PARTISAN APPROACH

Before considering Labour's attitude to Britain's traditional defence and foreign policies,(see next Chapter)a brief description and evaluation of the nation's strategic interests is necessary, covering the period since the war in general and from 1951-1964 - the period of opposition for Labour in particular. (See Annex A and B).

Although strategic policies pursued since the war were not always precise or clearly articulated certain perceived interests of the government emerged and the following analysis seeks to describe and evaluate them in general terms. As Professor Frankel wrote: "when we deal with a field as broad and as hard to comprehend as foreign policy, the temptation to resort to generalities becomes overwhelmingly strong".[1] This temptation is unavoidable because Labour inherited policies which it embraced when in power, and whose rationale and origins were relevant to its consideration of what it perceived to be in the national interest or indeed in the state's interests (if a distinction is to be drawn between the nation and the state). Labour when in power inherited liabilities conditioned by historical factors of long standing. As Anthony Eden observed ... "Britain's story and her interests lie far beyond the continent of Europe. Our thoughts move across the seas to the many communities in which our people play their part, in every corner of the world. That is our life: without it we should be no more than some millions of people living on an island off the cost of Europe."[2]

[1] Frankel, Joseph., National Interest, London, Pall Mall & Papermacs, 1970,p.4

[2] Mausergh, N. ,Documents and Speeches on Commonwealth Affairs 1931-1952, Vol. 2, London, Oxford University Press, 1953, p. 1157.

The view that the government of a great power cannot break free of the inertia and weight of traditional, or what Lord Palmerston called 'eternal interests', is strikingly reaffirmed in the foreign policies of successive Labour administrations. Clearly, as Hans J. Morgenthau recognised "the national interests of great powers, and in a good measure the methods by which it is to be secured, are impervious to ideological and institutional changes."[1]

But the emphasis on particular factors that generally constrain and shape the policies and decisions of political elites who form whatever government comes into existence must not be over-stressed. In fact though policy is shaped by intractable realities and unchanging circumstances, it would be wrong to take an entirely determinist view of the political process. Clearly "images, values, attitudes, beliefs and perception in foreign policy" play their part as well; and indeed hard 'interests' are really "subjective preferences".[2]

Clement Attlee's post-war government clearly had room for choice and to make one. There had long been a division of opinion in the corridors of power between the advocates of the so-called maritime and continental schools of strategy. But in this debate over the kind of international environment in which Britain should seek a suitable role for herself, there was a division between adherents to vague concepts of "Atlantic interdependence" and those who attached prime importance to similarly vague concepts of "European unity". In the new setting of the nuclear-missile age there emerged two different and differing conceptions of how best to promote the nation's strategic interests, that is, between

[1] Morgenthau, H.J. 'Restoration of American Politics', Vol. 3 of Politics in the Twentieth Century, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1962, p. 199.

[2] Barber, J. External Relations, DLO3, Block VII, Part 3, Open University Publication, p. 46.

choosing, essentially, the Europeanist and Atlanticist versions of security. It was clear that a long-term commitment to a continental strategy involved the sensible diminution of a commitment to a maritime strategy which was important in the context of an alliance system based on Washington.

However from the standpoint of this study, it is clear that Labour both in opposition and power accepted a bi-partisan approach to foreign and defence policies. For the Labour Party as a whole this meant a well merited commitment to the Commonwealth and a world role. It meant also Labour's commitment to NATO and a European balance of power. Broadly speaking, British defence policy after World War II must be examined in the light of the controversy between Atlantic independence and European partnership which became crucial after the abandonment by the US Department of Defence of the policy of relying principally on a capacity for massive retaliation. This policy was discarded some time after 1957 (though formally announced in July, 1962) in favour of a policy of flexible response.[1]

What is of interest and relevance at this juncture is the character and nature of British defence policy which, until 1968, put her firmly on the Atlantic side of the strategic debate. Indeed, given the nature of the policy described here, it is impossible to imagine Britain adopting anyother posture than that which assumed a global balance of power: that is (a) a part in NATO Europe; (b) membership of CENTO, the Middle East security pact; (c) participation in the South-East Asian Treaty Organisation (SEATO); (d) a close strategic connection with the USA: and (e) a "world

[1] Kaufmann, W.W. The McNamara Strategy (Harper and Row, New York, 1964). This study provides a clear account of how the doctrine of flexible response evolved.

role" whose scope and function outside the framework of the alliance systems often determined the character and nature of the Anglo-American alliance - in other words that special relationship.[1]

This special relationship induced an excessive British dependence on America, arising from the advanced weapons connection, which tended to undermine her independence and capacity to influence often reckless US policy in areas outside of Europe.[2] But undoubtedly in the early period of the post-war years, and in the 1950s in particular, Britain exercised a unique degree of influence over her major ally which can be said to be a direct reflection of her strategic importance to the security of the USA as well as to her general economic and political importance in Europe and the Commonwealth. The process by which the close relationship to the USA was established and enhanced can be seen in the evolution of British defence policy since 1945.

Britain in the aftermath of World War II faced a new strategic situation with essentially backward-looking policies. She perceived an immediate and traditional interest in a balance of power vis-a-vis, on this historic occasion, the Soviet Union whose armies had swept into Eastern and Central Europe in the wake of retreating German forces, thus creating an imbalance in the military and political forces affecting the states of Western Europe. Given the nature of Stalin's foreign policy, and the constantly reiterated ideological ambitions which the existence of large Communist minorities in France and Italy had exacerbated, the Labour Government of Clement Attlee, under the inspiration of its Foreign

[1] Bell, Coral, The Debatable Alliance (Oxford University Press, London, 1962). This book deals with the nature of the special relationship.

[2] Rosecrance, R. N, The Defence of the Realm: British Strategy in the Nuclear Epoch (Columbia University Press, New York and London, 1967). Presents evidence of British subserviency to United States aims.

Secretary, Ernest Bevin, decided to put its weight behind a counterpoise to over-weening ambition. This meant a specific commitment to keep troops in Europe for an indefinite period. Although the NATO treaty was for a minimum of twenty years, the British considered at the time that 50 years was much the likelier period for such deployment.

The NATO commitment was a dramatic departure from traditional policy, for in the past the interest in a European balance of power had not involved a specific military commitment to a continental strategy. Now within the framework of a multi-national alliance Britain had, at a time of peace, committed herself to the defence of Western Europe and, in the words of the 1962 Defence White Paper, "stationed large forces (in Europe) for the last sixteen years in complete contrast with our previous military dispositions".[1] The transition, all the same, from soldiers of occupation to militarily-committed allies was smoothly accomplished, The Berlin Crisis of 1948 and the Korean War saw to that.[2]

Fear of a Soviet invasion of Western Europe was widespread. It was of such dimensions as to compel America to abandon any thought of a return to her traditional policy of isolationism and to compel Britain, furthermore, to compromise the nature of her traditional maritime strategy. The critical step in playing a part in the land defence of Europe came in 1954. France's rejection of a European Defence Community, to the secret relief of Britain, led to the Churchill Government's undertaking to maintain in Europe for 50 years a force of some four army divisions and an air division. Though in the event the military

[1] Statement on Defence, 1962: The Next Five Years, H.M. Stationery Office, London, February, 1962, Cmnd. 1639 Part I, Ch. I, para.2, p.3.

[2] Rees, David, The Age of Containment (Macmillan, London, 1965). This book describes western reaction to perceived Soviet aggression.

contribution on the ground was more modest than this, the "unprecedented commitment", as Sir Anthony Eden (the late Earl of Avon) described it, was essential if "an effective defence system in Western Europe" was to become a reality. Indeed, "by giving this new commitment, we may succeed in bringing the Germans and French together, and keeping the Americans in Europe", Sir Anthony was giving obvious expression to the classic requirements of British policy.[1]

Yet this policy meant that Britain was about to over-commit herself to the defence of Western Europe at a time of considerable involvement elsewhere. Why Britain with a population of 50 million, a desiccated economy and larger overseas responsibilities should have been expected in early NATO planning to provide four divisions when an enormously wealthy USA, with a population four times as large, should have been expected to provide only five divisions was one of those questions that divided opinion within the Labour movement. Why Britain, moreover, and not the Americans, should have been left to make the long-term commitment of troops to West Germany in order to placate French fears about German rearmament was not very clear either to Left-Wing critics of Britain's over extended commitments.

Even the commitment of 80,000 men was a considerable undertaking and proved beyond Britain's manpower resources. Why? Because it was erroneously assumed that the formation of the Strategic Reserve and the Strategic Nuclear Force would diminish the need for manpower. With a

[1] Avon, Lord (Memoirs of), Full Circle (Cassell, London, 1960; Houghton Miffin, Cambridge, Mass., 1960), p.166

strategic reserve, smaller overseas bases would be maintained, it was asserted, and with the Strategic Nuclear Force the incidence of limited war would diminish. The 1954 Defence White Paper, for example, said that the Strategic Nuclear Force "should have an increasing effect upon the cold war by making less likely such adventures on the part of the Communist world as their aggression in Korea. This should be of benefit to us by enabling us to reduce the great dispersal of effort which the existing tension has hitherto imposed upon us."[1] The implication of this was clear enough: that overall manpower reductions would become possible. This was mistaken. The assumption that Britain's NATO commitment could be fulfilled by virtue of the release of manpower from overseas areas turned out to be over-optimistic. It was also soon discovered that a strategic nuclear capability was irrelevant to the needs of internal security which comprised the major challenge to British interests and resources outside the European theatre.

Hoist by her own petard, Britain found herself in the position of wanting for the defence of Europe the very troops now required for overseas security. With her large conscript army, the competing commitments could be met, but only just. Moreover, the 1957 White Paper announced the end of conscription by 1960. It was increasingly obvious, therefore, that both the overseas commitment and the British Army of the Rhine (BAOR) faced further reductions. The BAOR was, in fact, to be reduced in twelve months by 13,000 men to a strength of

[1] Statement on Defence, 1954: Annual White Paper (H.M. Stationery Office, London,) February 1954, Cmnd. 9075, Part I, Ch. 2, para. 3, p.5.

45,000 while the Second Tactical Air Force was to be reduced in size by one half. Only strong pressure by the USA forced the British to maintain the strength of 55,000 men in the BAOR which, since 1958, has been reduced by only 2,000 men. The foreign exchange cost of the BAOR, which in the early period averaged £50m a year, was a factor in determining the diminished contribution to the defence of Western Europe, but there was also an overt strategic reason. Britain began to argue that NATO needed a relatively small ground force component in a situation where nuclear weapons would be deployed early in a conflict in which the Soviet Union had committed large numbers of troops. Indeed, over-large conventional forces were seen as possibly weakening the credibility of the predominantly American strategic capability.

This interest in strategic warfare was rational and logical for the British who realised the difficulties they were in and seized hold of the concept of "interdependence", devised by NATO in late 1957, as a means to revert to a modern version of maritime strategy in which their sea, air and land components played a part in the collective defence of the West outside Europe. According to the government maintenance of "independent overseas responsibilities" provided "unquestionable benefits to the common cause". With the Strategic Nuclear Force, upgraded in the 1957 Defence White Paper, Britain was well placed to play a world role of some importance.[1] Interdependence in the British book of strategic thought was inevitably Atlanticist and not Europeanist. The strategic dichotomy was taking shape; London preferred Washington at the intergovernmental level to a possible supra-national European arrangement.

The Royal Navy had been assigned virtually to NATO. By 1961, in fact, 85 per cent of its strength was committed there. The navy had

[1] Statement on Defence, 1957: Report on Defence (H.M. Stationery Office, London) February, 1957, Cmnd. 363, Part I, Ch. I, para. 2, p.4.

become involved in backing-up an essentially continental strategy in a decisive way. Naval missions, though, were much the same; that is, maintenance of shipping and ocean communications and the blockade of enemy territorial waters. But the context of policy was different.

Hitherto the continental strategy had been as an alternative policy which was sometimes combined with that of the maritime strategy. The 1914-1918 war, for example, brought both strategies into play. The conflict itself, it is true, was primarily a land war whose outcome did not essentially depend upon the Royal Navy, though it did play a big part in enforcing an economic blockade and in deterring Germany's fleet from putting to sea. Moreover, Germany was not defeated until America appeared on the scene with fresh troops and an enormous industrial-technological capability which meant that the allies would in the end prevail.[1] Despite the Great War, and the French demand for security guarantees from Britain, a definite European commitment was not given until 1938. After World War II, as already seen, Britain formulated in 1949 a commitment to a continental strategy, which in time, under the impact of nuclear weapons and ballistic-missiles, meant that in any future war an enemy could not be brought to its knees by economic blockade.[2] Yet in the early days of NATO the naval strategy was traditional in the sense that - as it perhaps largely still is - the preoccupation was with anti-submarine warfare and mine-sweeping activities. This was to be expected because the carriers and commando ships were particularly attractive submarine targets.

But the basic British maritime strategy, relying on geography and a

[1] Williams, Geoffrey. The European-American Partnership, Sijthoff, August 1977. This study examines the historic intervention by America to restore a European balance of power.

[2] Snyder, W.P. The Politics of British Defence Policy (Ernest Benn, Columbus, Ohio, 1964). An interesting account of political factors affecting assessment of traditional strategic interests.

strong diversified navy to buy time to mobilise against a continental foe, was no longer adequate. Defence had come to depend upon NATO and "interdependence". That is to say, if deterrence should fail then such defence as remains would depend on a collective effort located east, not of the Channel, but of the Rhine. The Royal Navy busily co-operated with other allies and, since 1950, almost all manoeuvres in the Atlantic and Mediterranean have been joint exercises.

The development and composition of the Strategic Nuclear Force, together with Britain's external role, constituted for at least ten years the real source of British influence over the USA, as well as the source of independent military power upon which Britain's independence itself relied. In the strategic nuclear relationships between Britain and America lies the real motive force of the Atlanticist solution to security and, too, a striking indication of the meta-political relationship between the two English speaking nations whose interests, over basic issues, more often than not converged.

The Manhattan Project, under which from 1942 to 1946 the atomic bomb was successfully produced, was based upon the two wartime agreements of August, 1943, signed at Quebec, and the Hyde Park Agreement of September, 1944. This Anglo-American collaboration was breached by the McMahon Act of 1946 which ran in the face of the solemn agreement of 1943 and 1944. But by January, 1946, the independent nuclear programme was initiated and the decision to proceed with the actual making of weapons was announced in May, 1948.[1] Meanwhile, under the Blair House Agreement, negotiated

[1] Attlee, Clement. As it Happened (Heinemann, London, 1954). The statesman who was the Prime Minister of the day makes it clear that the British decision to become an atomic power was taken almost casually.

in January, 1948, and which sought to establish areas of research (none having any relation to weapons), some degree of Anglo-American collaboration was restored. All the same, the brilliant research programme initiated by the Attlee Government resulted in the first British atomic bomb being built by 1952, the appearance of which gave greater substance to the reality of the American commitment to defend Europe. The often expressed British fear that the USA might be less than reliable was one important, though not decisive, reason for acquiring atomic weaponry. When the decision was taken to acquire atomic weapons, the weapons base of the UK was still that of a great power. Since the British armed forces built their own equipment, a capacity equalled only by that of the USSR and the USA, the decision not to proceed with nuclear weapons would have been surprising in the post-war period.[1]

In the Defence White Paper of 1955 was disclosed the decision to acquire thermonuclear weapons and these were first tested in May, 1957. When the thermonuclear programme was announced, the justification advanced by the Prime Minister of the day, Sir Winston Churchill, was based upon a counter-force strategy: counter-force in the sense that the main justification was military as well as political. The independent nuclear programme, said Churchill in the defence debate in the House of Commons in March, 1955, enabled a British scheme of priorities, as opposed to an American scheme of priorities, if war should come.[2]

Churchill argued that relative priorities in targeting had been,

[1] Beaton, Leonard and Maddox, John. The Spread of Nuclear Weapons (Institute for Strategic Studies, Chatto and Windus, London, 1962). This study presents a reasoned argument explaining the emergence of the British deterrent.

[2] Hansard, House of Commons, Vol. 537, March 1, 1955, c.987.

and would remain, a vitally important subject, especially in the light of past actual experience. For example, in the closing stages of World War II the Royal Air Force had attacked the V-1 and V-2 missile sites, which in the alliance scheme of priorities might not have been removed at all. Indeed, the old war-time leader might well have referred to his 1940 decision to withhold fighter aircraft for the defence of Britain, the outcome of which determined the Battle of Britain and the course of the war itself. Decisions of that kind depended upon military capability together with the will to commit its use in the supreme interests of national security.

Interest in a strategic nuclear force went back to several earlier policies, as Churchill made plain, and in particular to the war-time effort to effect strategic air bombardment. The interest in the efficacy of strategic bombardment had been a much earlier pre-occupation which had been propounded by Lord Trenchard, the Chief of the Air Staff from 1919 to 1929. He had articulated the doctrine that aerial bombardment can be decisive.[1] Even so, the actual contribution of strategic bombing to World War II has been subjected to analysis which suggests that aerial bombardment had not decisively harmed the civilian-industrial base of Germany. Only in the last year of the war did strategic bombing really hurt the German economy.[2]

Nonetheless, the development in 1945 of atomic weapons seemed to herald a technological break-through which, in the fullness of time, would vindicate the devotees of Trenchard who had supposed aerial bombardment to have cataclysmic qualities capable of decisive results.[3]

[1] Speech to the Aeronautical Society, Cambridge University, reported in The Daily News, London, October 25, 1925.

[2] See, for instance, Frankland, Noble. The Strategic Bombing of Germany, (Faber, London, 1965).

[3] See, Leonard, R.A. The Rise of the Bomber: a Comprehensive Analysis of the Development of National Doctrines of Strategic Bomber Aviation, 1914-41 (unpublished thesis, University of London, completed in 1968).

This development coincided with the development in 1947, by the RAF, of long-range bomber aircraft which included the *Vulcan* and *Victor* subsonic bombers that were due for service in 1956. These were later augmented, as "further insurance", by the *Valient*, procured in 1953 for the creation of a "Strategic Air Command" model for the RAF. An interim aircraft, the *Canberra* tactical strike reconnaisance aircraft (the "TSR-1", as it were), was brought into service in 1950. By the end of 1958, the "V" bombers were reaching their peak of effectiveness as the strategic means to deliver nuclear weapons, based upon either a counter-force or a counter-city strategy. In fact, in terms of capability the *Victors* and *Vulcans* possessed better heights and speeds than the American B-52, the chief delivery vehicle of the time.

With the announcement in the 1957 White Paper that the inter-continental ballistic missile (ICBM), *Blue Streak*, would be in the service by 1960, the scene was set for the next leap forward, to the requirements of complex retaliatory deterrent systems. Then came the great pay-off: joint strategic planning with America's Strategic Air Command. This least considered aspect of joint planning enabled Britain to help determine the targets actually to be attacked and, in political terms, may be considered Atlanticist, rather than Europeanist, in orientation. The real significance, however, is that this joint planning was the prelude to the restoration of the pre-McMahon Act situation permitting exchange of nuclear information, confirmed in the agreement of October, 1957, which restored to good health the Anglo-American connection on advanced weaponry.[1]

[1] See Pierre, Andrew, Nuclear Politics: The British Experiment with an Independent Strategic Force 1939-1970.

From 1957 onwards a speedy build-up of nuclear stocks took place and, given the excellent means of delivery, the British deterrent was then both credible and independent. The "V" bombers gave a brilliant showing when, in 1955, the RAF flew them in the US Strategic Air Command bombing competition, gaining ninth and twelfth places respectively out of 164 crews.[1] The US Administration had every reason to consider that Britain was a strong and dependable ally. Her Suez aberration was soon forgotten.

At the first post-Suez encounter, when President Dwight Eisenhower and Mr. Macmillan sought to defuse overcharged diplomatic relations, it was agreed to have installed in Britain sixty *Thor* liquid-fuelled intermediate range rockets, each with a two megaton warhead. This move was actually to increase the influence of the British Government over its super-power ally and was further evidence of the Anglo-Saxon preference for Atlanticist solutions to their joint security. An earlier antecedent had been the stationing of US B-29s in East Anglia in 1948 at the request of Attlee. And, indeed, the decision to help the USA develop the ballistic missile early warning system (BMEWS) was confirmation of this fact.

The critical issue was, nevertheless, for the British Government, the future of the *Blue Streak*, which was to supersede the "V" bombers as the major means of delivery (the "V" bombers themselves having had their performance enhanced by the development of the *Blue Steel* "standoff" weapon enabling the attacking aircraft to launch its attack 100 miles from the target out of range of a local air defence). Cost escalation, the realisation that the liquid-fuelled rockets had been rendered

[1] Williams, Geoffrey, Natural Alliance for the West, Atlantic Trade Study, 1969, p.19.

[2] Williams, Geoffrey, The Permanent Alliance: The European-American Partnership 1945-1984, A. W. Sijthoff, 1977, pp. 187-188.

obsolescent by the solid-fuelled variety and the search for credible second strike retaliatory systems, made cancellation of the project inevitable. *Skybolt*, an airborne and air-launched missile system, was the logical replacement. The cancellation of *Blue Streak* however, raised the whole issue of the future of the deterrent system itself, and it signalled an end to Britain's technical capability to construct a long-range ballistic missile system at an acceptable cost.[1]

Britain's deterrent force was considered to be essentially "second-strike", even though it would be more effective as a first-strike force; and its joint role with US Strategic Air Command, in the context of alliance policy, made it a powerful addition to the West's retaliatory system.

The credibility of the British force would nonetheless be enhanced, it was considered,by the attachment of *Skybolt*, a two-stage air-to-ground rocket. The US Administration was prepared to sell the rocket and the British Government wanted to buy it to extend the life of the manned bomber over the late 1960s and 1970s. President Eisenhower saw no objection to the prospect, if it was technologically possible, of supplying the RAF with a weapon the US Air Force was going to take into service anyway. But it was not technologically possible at an acceptable economic cost. Two years later this fact was faced.

Following the liquidation of the Cuban missile crisis in 1962 the Kennedy Administration decided to forgo the *Skybolt* project. The decision was related, in the American consideration, to the so-called

[1] Williams, Geoffrey. The Strategy of the TSR-2, International Journal, Canadian Institute of International Affairs, Vol. XXV, No. 4, 1970, pp. 727-744.

[2] Williams, Geoffrey, Williams, Alan, Crisis in European Defence, Charles Knight, 1974, pp. 52-53.

McNamara thesis on nuclear strategy propounded by the US Defence Secretary at Ann Arbor, in the University of Michigan, earlier that year.[1] This analysis of Mr. McNamara's was the pristine version of Atlanticist strategy. It is worth recalling its central features: (1) the construction of an invulnerable second-strike capacity, (2) the implementation of "graduated deterrence" in which "controlled escalation" would limit the chances of an outright nuclear exchange, (3) the concept of "centralised control" in which the notion of the flexible response was geared to a process of rational decision-making largely in the hands of the USA within the context of alliance policy, and (4) a counterforce strategy directed towards disarming the enemy and sparing his cities as a hostage to fortune.[2] The thesis was a sophisticated concept of a self-denying ordinance in which great restraint would be the order of the day. One disturbing corollary, from the British point of view, was that the idea of a "centralised control" meant, in effect, an end to "secondary deterrent systems.[3] Labour frankly welcomed this part of the McNamara thesis and under a Labour Government the deterrent would be phased out in line with the party's declared policy. That is the British deterrent would be committed irrevocably to NATO. But this is to anticipate.

British defence policy, which in so far as it had to cope with competing commitments, in Europe and beyond Europe, relied very heavily on a strategic capacity that was supplied by the Strategic Nuclear Force and the Strategic Reserve. This accordingly meant an overt reliance on sophisticated weapons-systems which were because of their inherent complexity largely dependent on American technological expertise. Nuclear deterrence came to rest increasingly on a credible means of delivery, which *Skybolt* might have made possible. Beyond Europe, in

1 See general discussion of doctrine in Tarr, David. American Strategy in the Nuclear Age (Macmillan, London, 1964).

2 See Schelling, Thomas C. The Strategy of Conflict (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass.,1960) for a discussion of overt communication with an adversary as part of a deterrence posture.

3 Hartley, Anthony. "The British Bomb", Encounter, London, August 1964.

situations East of Suez, a British capability required a high performance tactical strike reconnaisance aircraft, such as the projected TSR-2. The demise of both these projects therefore made an enormous impact on British defence policy.[1]

The crisis over the *Skybolt* project was an important episode in the history of Anglo-American relations. Yet it, too, was further evidence of the Atlanticist solution to security. A brief description of the crisis is necessary. For the cancellation of *Skybolt* raised an acute problem for the Macmillan Government; namely, how to keep Britain in the nuclear business. One obvious solution would have been to find an alternative weapons-systems. And one did exist. On the other hand, perhaps, the US Administration might be persuaded, it was thought, to develop *Skybolt* with a heavier British share of the research and development programme. This suggestion was eventually made. In the end President Kennedy offered *Polaris*, the nuclear missile, on acceptable terms, but not before a crisis in relations between the two respective governments.[2]

What the Nassau Agreement provided was a weapons system actually superior to that originally sought by Britain. It made explicit the Atlanticist option and this the communique confirmed as spelt out in articles 6, 7 and 8. Article 6 sought to place the British *Polaris* echelon under a multi-national force (MNF). Article 7 carried a commitment to place (later) the British force in a multilateral force (MLF). And Article 8 envisaged a commitment to either force. Now it is perfectly clear that, although in a situation of extreme national peril

[1] See detailed study of TSR-2 cancellation decision in Williams, Geoffrey, et. al., Crisis Procurement; a case study of the TSR-2, RUSI, London, 1969.

[2] Williams, Geoffrey and Alan, Crisis in European Defence, op. cit., pp. 54-55.

(the escape clause) the British had the right to withdraw the force from eithercommitment (that is, either to the MNF or the MLF, as the case may be), the Nassau Agreement was an expression of Atlanticist policy.

Indeed, President de Gaulle was widely understood to have vetoed the British application to join the EEC, in the winter of 1963, largely because of the above agreement (although there may have been other important reasons as well). But the agreement itself was largely advantageous to Britain. The cost of the *Polaris* centre-sections, to be emplaced in five British-built submarines, was £350m which, spread over five years, worked out at £70m a year.[1] This was a very modest investment for the most durable and sophisticated of second-strike retaliatory systems then available. The cost to Britain of the *Skybolt* project had been expected, on the other hand, to be in the region of £500m and since, in any event, that weapon would have had to be replaced later by the *Polaris* system, or something like it, the total cost of both systems would have been close to £1,000m. The Nassau Agreement was a triumph for Mr. Macmillan and a striking indication of the American regard to the importance of the Anglo-American alliance. The concept of interdependence had been dramatically endorsed. Labour took a different view. The Nassau agreement was to be re-negotiated if Labour came to power.

Early in 1957 the decision was taken to procure a low-flying tactical and reconaissance strike-bomber which was to replace the *Canberra*. This decision marked the beginning of a long-drawn out controversy about the shape and size of the RAF in the years that lay ahead. Mr. Duncan Sandys, the then Minister of Defence, had declared that there was to be no replacement for the *Lightning* (an interceptor aircraft) and

[1] Beaton, Leonard. A Nuclear Policy for Britain, The Manchester Guardian Weekly, Manchester, February 14 and 15, 1963.

had ruled out a successor to the "V" bombers. In accordance with this decision, in March 1957, Mr. Aubrey Jones, the Minister of Supply, issued "General Operational Requirement 339". Several companies were approached for their views on the design of an aircraft to replace the *Canberra*.[1] This move, however, was complicated by a row between the RAF and the Royal Navy. They both required a low-flying strike aircraft. Could they share the same plane? The RAF perceived the need quickly to find a sophisticated strike aircraft if they were to remain a formidable force. And the Royal Navy was equally determined to possess the best strike aircraft that the British aircraft industry could provide. Mr. Sandys decided though that one aircraft could not fulfil both service roles. The decision was critical. For it limited the number of planes over which the TSR-2's development costs could be spread.

The number of aircraft eventually ordered was modest; namely, a "development batch" of nine "pre-production aircraft" amounting to production of a super-prototype. But the real difficulty lay in selling the aircraft which, at this stage, only Australia was likely to require for a price within £3m each. Cost escalation turned into the most important factor. The Chiefs of Staff divided over the project. Inter-service rivalry became rampant with Admiral of the Fleet Lord Mountbatten, a convinced opponent of the aircraft, and Air Marshal Sir Thomas Pike, the fighter expert, its combative RAF proponent, in open conflict over the project.[2]

The RAF seemed to be fighting for its life and, although it was

[1] See detailed history of the TSR-2 project in Hastings, Stephen. The Murder of the TSR-2 (MacDonald, London, 1966). Also see Williams, Geoffrey and Simpson, John op. cit. p. 18-23.

[2] op. cit., p. 27.

shortly to be the turn of the Fleet Air Arm, the Royal Navy watched the expected death-throes with equinimity. With no replacements in the offing for either the "V" bombers, or the prospect of a new generation of interceptors, the RAF was determined to get the TSR-2, or its equivalent, and replacements also for everything else they flew, meaning *Beverley* transports and *Hunter* fighters as well as *Canberra* bombers. A powerful ally came to hand: Mr. Julian Amery. His appointment as Minister of Aviation in July, 1962, was the prelude to a heavy investment in air power. Just under a year later, the Government, at the behest of Mr. Amery, ordered a further eleven pre-production models of the TSR-2, only four months before Australia opted with shattering effect for the US swing-wing F-111. The decision of Sir Robert Menzies' Government, a vital blow at Commonwealth interdependence (not that there had been much consultation between London and Canberra), dashed the hopes of the TSR-2 proponents and, so it then appeared, all but put paid to an expanding and dynamic British aircraft industry.[1]

Britain was out of the race. For she could hardly expect to compete on a cost-basis with the large number of F-111s (some 1,700 models) about to go into production. Australia, by not placing an order made it certain that only a hundred TSR-2s would be built which meant that the spread of production costs would rise steeply and thus price the aircraft out of world markets. Development costs were estimated at that stage to be around £250m and this figure had yet to take into account production expenditure.[2]

[1] ibid., pp. 28-30.

[2] See Chapter VII for analysis of cost of this project and of cancellation charges.

Despite the cost-escalation factor, the Douglas-Home Government pressed ahead. Between February and March, 1964, it placed orders for the P-1154 vertical take-off aircraft and the Hawker Siddeley 681 short take-off transport. In addition to this £500m order, the British Aircraft Corporation was authorized to spend what was needed to get the TSR-2 into production.[1] Thirty models were ordered and, with consummate timing, on September 27, 1964, only four weeks before the Conservative Governments's election defeat, the aircraft climbed majestically into the sky. Labour was shortly to face some difficulty procurement decisions. The TSR-2 cancellation decision was quick to follow.

Some Conclusions: Britain's Military Capability

Taking the period under review, with major politico-military crises occurring at the rate of one a year over the entire period, the number of occasions in which Britain was involved in military incidents was relatively few. Certainly, British experience confirmed the length, and costliness, of counter-insurgency operations, on the one hand, and the relative shortness of intervention operations, on the other. Although this was not surprising, Britain's effort contrasted dramatically with the scale of France's effort and that of the USA. France used 263,000 men in Indo-China and 400,000 in Algeria. From 1961 down to 1966 and beyond the Americans had a deployed maximum of 464,000 in South Vietnam. By constrast the British, in admittedly more favourable circumstances, deployed 44,000 soldiers and airmen in Cyprus and 51,000 in Malaya.

A brief historical account of overseas operations would be incomplete, however, without reference to the two means whereby such

[1] Hansard, House of Commons, Vol. 688, February 5, 1964, cc. 148-9.

operations were to be launched. The first method to be devised in the mid-1950s was the air-lifted Strategic Reserve. The second was the build-up of the Naval Task Force with its organic ground combat units, supporting transport and a limited logistic re-supply capability. This maritime capability appealed to Labour in Opposition and constituted, as we shall see, the core of Labour's defence policy as formulated between 1960 and 1964 (see Chapter IV).

Air-lift capability before 1956 was very limited. It amounted to only fifteen C-123 transports. Any increase was hampered by competition for resources between Bomber Command and Transport Command. But the aircraft that entered the service after 1956, namely the *Beverley* freighter, *Bristol Britannia* and *Comet* 2, were all limited in regard to equipment and operational requirements. Neither the *Britannia* nor the *Comet* could operate from unimproved tactical airstrips for air-drops of troops and equipment. And the three-fold expansion in air-lift capacity between 1955 and 1960 was found to be "counter-productive" because of the so-called "air-Barrier" which, especially in the Middle East and South Asia, threatened the viability of speedy interventions. Fortunately, this handicap never did become critical and, of course, before 1956 it was of no particular significance.[1] In any event, stock-piling at strategic points was the only real answer. For example, the flight to Aden, should a quick replacement be necessary, involved an indirect route. Flights to the entrance of the Red Sea involved going via Malta and Libya (El Adem). This posed the whole problem of over-flying and landing rights.

Singapore also became a stockpile, the importance of which was diminished, though never removed, by the better air-lift capability

[1] Synder, W., op. cit.

achieved by 1962-63. This was the result of the coming into service of the long-range turbo-jet *Britannia* and the *Argosy* transport aircraft, both being a type of aircraft designed to carry bulky equipment or paratroopers. Additionally, the ten *Belfasts* were in service by 1965; and in 1967 they were replaced by the C-130.[1] It was realised that a more rapid response would compensate for smaller forces and fewer bases. The strategic air-lift mission was then given top priority.

The Naval Task Force comprised the commando ship, the carrier and supporting logistic vessels, which amounted to a self-sufficient force strong enough to deal with "brush-fire" type incidents. The commando ship was developed by the Royal Navy after the 1956 Suez affair. For during the Suez operation, HMS *Ocean* and HMS *Theseus* were used to transport marines even though they were aircraft carriers. The use of helicopters at Suez was illustrative of the helicopter-borne landings which the Americans made much use of in Vietnam. Experience of Suez as a limited war, and the increasing number of intervention operations, heightened interest in the carrier (which was declared to be the capital ship, the "core of the modern navy", according to the White Paper of 1955) and confirmed the belief in the growing importance in an air and sea capability. Increased "afloat support" was the essential pre-requisite of limited operations. The way the commando ship meshed with the carrier group and afloat support ensured greater mobility for the task force. And this amphibious task group became, despite the cut in the 1957-58 Royal Navy estimates, an established part of the operational fleet and was first to be in operation in the summer of 1958 in Jordan and, later, in Kuwait in mid-1961.[2]

[1] Natural Alliance for the West, op. cit., p.30.

[2] ibid.

But the air-lifted Strategic Reserve and commando ships were not in the event to replace the army as principal component of military capability. For the built-in limitations on the size of forces that could be deployed by these means made it impossible for them to be a substitute for the permanent base which is necessary to maintain control of a given geographical area. Britain nevertheless had the ability to rapidly employ small combined forces in the arc from Aden to Hong Kong.

The question of the need for tactical air support beyond the radius of RAF aircraft operating from land bases meant that the decision to build a new aircraft carrier, announced in July, 1963, was a recognitian of the fact that limited wars, or intervention operations, required carrier-based aircraft. This requirement remained an important and valid part of British power outside Europe for over a decade. And Labour's decision in 1966 (to be examined later) to phase-out the carrier was an early indication of the intention to reassess the nature of Britain's commitments East of Suez.[1]

While tactical reaction was greatly facilitated by the use of helicopters and transport aircraft, strategic reaction had been greatly enhanced by the build-up of air-borne and amphibious forces. Politico-strategic factors had required Britain in the post-war period to have forces deployed in the Indo-Pacific theatre. The composition of her tri-service effort had been influenced accordingly.

The Royal Navy had been acquiring smaller but more complex ships.

[1] Statement on Defence Estimates, 1966. (H.M. Stationery Office, London, February, 1966, Cmnd. 2901, Part I.

The British Army's balance between fighting arms had remained singularly constant. And the RAF, although uncertain about its future, following the cancellation of the TSR-2, the cancellation of the F-111 order and the cancellation of the AFVGA project, had revealed up to 1966 and later a marked increase in the proportion of transport aircraft, with a corresponding decrease in fighters. The diminished importance of the manned defensive fighter, and the expected growth in importance of the rocket at the expense of all tactical air power, were also trends discernible in procurement policy.

Superimposed on the tri-service composition came the major strategic change of responsibility for the nuclear deterrent force. From being an exclusive RAF role it became an exclusive Royal Navy responsibility. It might be suspected though that tactical nuclear weapons ear-marked for RAF use could be discovered to have a prospective strategic role. All the same, the deployment and composition of British forces reflected the strategic and tactical roles required of them. The greater involvement in the Far East had of course meant participation in operations very much at the lower end of the spectrum of violence. In order to test what has been most used at the "sharp end" of warfare, a general evaluation of each of the 22 major operations would produce the following conclusion: All the operations were land campaigns with naval and air support; and no major challenge was made upon the sea or in the air to Britain's exercise of power during the seventeen years.

The army made great use of infantry, lesser use of artillery and armour. As regards the navy, it is at times difficult to distinguish between, on the one hand, deployments designed to maintain a naval presence and, on the other, those connected specifically with actual operations. But it appears that every type of ship was used and put to uses for which they were not primarily designed. The built-in flexibility of the Royal Navy enabled them to rise to the occasion although the use of all available operational units, and often for long periods, created some strain.[1] In examining the navy's role, three tasks can be distinguished: (1) amphibious operations, (2) off-shore work and (3) in-shore patrol work. With off-shore patrols accounting for the lion's share of the work, and in-shore patrols also playing an important part, the Royal Navy found plenty to do.[2]

The RAF was not required to establish air superiority. It played a deterrent role in a wider range of operations. But as in the navy, every type of aircraft has been used and, of course, in tasks for which they were not procured to perform. With the increasing use of transport aircraft, particularly helicopters (especially after 1963), the tactical reaction was improved enormously. In the 1950s, for example, fixed-wing transport planes constituted the second largest service function; in fact, second only to fighter aircraft whose dominance was rivalled after 1963 by that of the helicopter and fighter function. The bomber and maritime functions declined after 1960, although between 1951 and 1954, and especially at the time of the Suez operation, the bomber

[1] Statement on Defence Estimates, 1966. op. cit., Part I.

[2] Natural Alliance for the West, op. cit., p.32.

function, with that of the maritime role, was a considerable one. The helicopter and fighter function increased at the expense of the bomber and maritime function.[1]

What can be said about what had been used most? The most used component of British military power has been the infantry. No conflict had ever necessitated a fight to establish naval or air superiority. This is partly a reflection of the primitive nature of the opposition. But much more strikingly, it is a tribute to the success Britain had in deterring a threat to her interests by using, or threatening to use, violence in all three spheres. The challenge had come on land, and in this environment the challenge had been met. It was perhaps paradoxical that Britain's traditional overseas policy should be upheld in the nuclear-missile age by the least sophisticated component of military power: the infantry. The soldier on the ground, however, depended upon the navy and air force for his cover, sustenance and protection. The East of Suez role had proved possible ~~viable~~ in military terms but the era of overstretch was about to dawn. Labour was to grapple with the problem of overstretch once it came to power with its own version of Britain's imperial role. That controversy both in Opposition and in office proved dangerously divisive for Labour. Yet the ideology of Labourism was perfectly consistent with the idea of the maintenance of Britain as a great power.

[1] See Annex C, D and E relating to U.K. Emergency Operations 1950-1966.

CHAPTER III

THE LABOUR PARTY AND BRITAIN'S GLOBAL ROLE: 1951-1964

A general and periodic criticism of Britain's foreign and defence policy is that re-appraisal and re-definition of policy have occurred largely as reactions to fortuitous developments in the international environment. A response has usually come in relation to short term crises. This was clearly demonstrated in the case of Britain's East of Suez policy. However, within the domestic environment such shifts in policy can be resisted by those groups which adopt an a priori approach to external policy as revealed by Labour's Left Wing, which consistently perceived the East of Suez role in more overt ideological terms. The East of Suez role was, however, part of the foreign policy orthodoxy which the Left found periodically unacceptable. However, the Labour Government of 1945-51 had in no way violated continuity in foreign policy. Mr. Attlee's government pursued a traditional and well-established foreign policy. It was exactly this continuity, this foreign policy consensus, that the 'utopian' and 'scientific socialist' Left wanted to break.[1] In its view a socialist foreign policy would be fundamentally different from the one pursued by the Labour Cabinet.

Labour's Left Wing, divided between the 'utopians' and the 'scientific socialists', however, were split over their attitude to the Commonwealth. The Left were more ideologically motivated than the majority of the Party both inside and outside the parliamentary party. The Left disliked the

[1] Ernest Bevin reiterated the continuity of British foreign policy when he argued with the Conservative Opposition's spokesman that, in the coalition Government during the war, he had never differed on any important issue of foreign policy. Vol. 413. H. of C. 20th August, 1945. Col. 312.

unequal and exploitative nature of the Commonwealth epitomised by the concept of a 'mother country'. According to this section of the Left, the Commonwealth was not socialist, and could never be so until Britain itself was socialist. They regarded themselves as internationalists, and therefore exponents of true socialism.

The Social Democrats and the Labourites, whom we can identify as in the mainstream of the Labour Party, on the other hand, saw the existing Commonwealth as something wholly admirable and viable. This attitude was strengthened with the manifest failure of Western Europe to embrace socialism and with Europe becoming divided both territorially and politically in the cold war. The Commonwealth was perceived as that potential 'third force' which would make unnecessary a choice between unreformed capitalism and totalitarian communism. It was hoped that a strong and viable Commonwealth would help prevent "... the splitting of the world into two blocs" and would thus make "... the One World of U.N.O. a reality".[1] The Bandung Conference of 1955 even gave a certain respectability to this view by strengthening its own part in the transformation of the Commonwealth of the old dominions into the New or Afro-Asian Commonwealth under Mr. Attlee's post-war administration. And yet the Commonwealth, so admired by the 'utopian' and 'scientific socialist' Left never existed as a viable political force in international politics. The Commonwealth remained a loose assembly of nations.

Despite the markedly different ideological stance between the Left and the Right and centre, there existed no major disagreement over the ultimate futility of an East of Suez presence. The Labour Party as a whole

[1] Keep Left. 1947. p.42.

foresaw an end to it, claiming that the end of colonialism should mean the end of military involvement. Clearly, the arguments which related to India, Burma and Ceylon were also relevant elsewhere; that the countries in the area would never achieve genuine independence while Britain retained a military presence and that Britain by supporting unrepresentative fuedal elites simply imposed neo-colonialism on notionally independent states.

It was the social democratic Left, together with the solid right of the parliamentary party, though, rather than the Marxist intellectuals, which tended to gain support from within the extra-parliamentary party. It achieved this by maintaining a distinction between Soviet expansionism which it would oppose and indigenous communism which it insisted on "... had much better come to terms with".[1] This opposition to Soviet imperialism, combined with a determination that feudalism and corrupt foreign capitalist or neo-capitalist regimes should not be sustained, aroused some sympathy within a Party which itself had struggled to change the status quo. There remained, however, substantial areas of disagreement between the Marxist and social-democratic Left over foreign and colonial policies.

These areas of ideological disagreement had grown as a result of the erosion of many of the traditional socialist principles and beliefs. So-called 'revisionism' had carried the day with the triumph of the values of social democracy. The principle of collective security had been undermined by the feeble opposition of the League of Nations to Hitler and Mussolini due to lack of support from the Anglo-French

[1] Crossman, R.H.S. Socialist Foreign Policy 1951, p.15.

governments for tough league action. In addition, the belief that working class loyalties would transcend national boundaries had been undermined by the unhesitating support given to nation-states in both world wars. And finally the belief that capitalism as such explained the cause of international conflict had been invalidated by the subsequent belligerance and expansionism of 'socialist' Russia. The erosion of these principles, however, progressed at different levels within the Party and led to conflicting attitudes towards the cold war.

Whilst the Right of the Party both inside Parliament and the Cabinet expounded the value of self defence and underlined the menace of the Soviet Union, the Left both inside and outside parliament continued to champion collective security and to sympathise more with the Soviet Union than with the United States. It also retained its faith in traditional socialist principles, the primary factors being economic determinism and the related notion of imperialism. This analysis revealed that "... all the policies of a nation are directly determined by its economic system" and it consequently pinpointed the U.S. as the main enemy to socialism. According to the Socialist Union, a body of moderate socialist opinion, the Leftist belief in economic determinism had led it to "... the rigid view that there are clear cut economic systems obeying immutable laws. Compared with these,all that might spring from the different political, social and cultural institutions of a country is of small moment. It matters not if America has free institutions; the fact that she is capitalist has been enough to damn her; and the contrary in the case of Russia".[1]

The conflicting interpretation of the politico-strategic intentions

[1] Foreword by Noel-Baker, P. Socialism and Foreign Policy. 1953, p.31.

of the U.S. and the U.S.S.R., made for very different analyses of the cold war, and Britain's role East of Suez was increasingly related to this wider analysis. It was said, by the marxist or far-left that Britain's world role would increase her reliance on the United States by making her economically dependent or even a mere client of that country. It complained that the U.S. army was, in 1947, half the size of the British one in proportion to population,[1] and that the inevitable consequence of pursuing a Conservative type foreign policy was that Britain would become "... a pensioner of America, earning its living by fighting America's wars overseas".[2] Britain could become an auxilliary of the United States.

The Left emphasized the dangers inherent in such a policy. "If America supported by the Labour Government, organises 'collective security' against Russia and uses dollar loans to prop up anti-Communist regimes around her frontiers, the Communist leaders can draw only one conclusion. They will assume the worst and stand stubbornly on the defensive until their scientists have made sufficient atomic bombs to redress the balance of military power".[3] If the Labour Government allowed this strategic error to occur, so the critics maintained, an unbridgeable dichotomy would develop between East and West, and any chance of a diplomatic understanding with the U.S.S.R. would be unredeemably lost. Aneurin Bevan in fact resigned from the Shadow Cabinet on the 15th April, 1954 over Labour's support for U.S. policy in South East Asia, and Harold Wilson, later to lead the Party, was in total agreement with his colleague's left wing sentiments on the dangers of America's containment policy.

[1] A further statistic used by the Left was that Britain had one million more troops in May 1947 than in pre-war days, "In effect Britain at the moment has these large forces in order to keep up appearance, she is maintaining something which is beyond her means and every other power knows it." Keep Left, 1947, p.30.

[2] Keep Left, 1947, p.33.

[3] Keep Left, 1947, pp. 33-4.

Both the utopian and Marxist Left, moreover, found the support of non-democratic regimes by the West, simply because they were anti-communist, ideologically and morally repugnant. Harold Wilson, a tactical member of the Left, but in reality a reconstructed revisionist ~~Gaitskellite~~, in an impassioned speech, articulated the Left's reservations about the existing policy. "We must not join with, nor in any way encourage the anti-Communist crusade in Asia, whether it is under the leadership of the Americans or anyone else. We must remember that the road to peace in Asia is the way of Nehru, not the way of Dulles".[1] This posture became known as the 'New Statesman, London, New Delhi' axis.

The Left thus believed that Britain's East of Suez role revealed a much wider and more dangerous tendency than Britain's wish to remain a residual imperial power; namely it involved becoming a subordinate partner to the United States in an attempt to build up anti-Communist regimes around Russia's frontiers. Such a policy, it was said, would reduce the scope for a third force mediatory role between the superpowers by relating all international conflict to the cold war. The result would be that "... every small people has to choose between the bleak alternative of anti-Communism and Communism. We shall sharpen the conflict instead of healing it..."[2] Accordingly the Left virtuously insisted that "The task of British Socialism must be, wherever possible, to save the smaller nations from this futile ideological warfare and to heal the breach between the U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R.[3] This could not though be achieved if Britain were herself committed to an elaborate global anti-Communist alliance system. This was the overwhelming objection to East of Suez role.

[1] Foot, P. The Politics of Harold Wilson, 1968. p.203.

[2] Keep Left, 1947, p.34.

[3] Keep Left, 1947, p.35.

It was even supposed that a third World War could be prevented if Britain broke with America.

The Left, anyway, argued that communism could not be confronted or defeated by military means. It saw the Soviet threat as "... in the first instance economic, social and ideological..."[1] and argued that "The most valuable allies of the Soviet are those elements in society which fight against social reforms."[2] According to the Left, it was the general lack of grasp concerning social and economic factors that accounted for Soviet successes. It complained that while "The underfed masses yearn for material aid; we send them guns". Aneuran Bevan put the classic view most emphatically. "The answer to social upheaval is social amelioration, not bombing planes and guns; yet we are making the latter on such a scale that we have no resources left for the provision of industrial equipment which the underdeveloped areas of the world must have, if they are not to go on bubbling and exploding for the rest of the century".[3]

The foreign policy advocated by the Left then called for the rejection of the belief that British security depended on the military power of the United States, and urged an acceptance of the "... accomplished fact that the defence of the Middle East, as well as of India, Burma and Malaya, is no longer a responsibility of the British people".[4] It was argued further that "... a break with old fashioned imperial tradition..." was necessary "... if we are to bring our foreign commitments into a true relationship with our economic strength and with

[1] Bevan, A. In Place of Fear, 1952. p.123.

[2] Bevan, A. Op. cit., p.124.

[3] Bevan, A. Op. Cit., p.137-138.

[4] Keep Left, 1947. p.45.

our Socialist principles".[1] The Left, of course, over-simplified the East of Suez issue, but their analysis and prescription positively reflected basic values and was not therefore an attitude likely to change in the light of international environment. Ideological commitment to the Left preceded and superceded political realities as understood by the Social Democratic Left of the Labour Party.

It was to be expected that the classic case for social and economic priorities over military ones, based as it was on traditional Socialist principles, would gain considerable support and significance from within a Party which, when reverting to opposition had always reinforced and emphasised the role of ideals and downgraded the influence of environment upon declaratory policy.

The official Party line was however still very different from the one advocated by the Left. The Labour leadership's assessment that the turmoil in South East Asia was due to local nationalist forces seeking to overthrow European rule and to an 'economic revolution' born out of the Asians' newly found realisation of their wretched poverty was a conclusion which the Left had no reason to controvert.

However, the Labour leadership argued that a British presence East of Suez could not be regarded as a residual method of discharging post-colonial responsibilities, because the Soviety 'threat' in the area had increased. It was this presumed threat which tended to confuse the distinction, for the Labour leadership, between non-belligerent reactionary and non-belligerent progressive regimes. If a friendly state were being undermined by Soviet action, overt or covert in character,

[1] ibid.

then Labour tended to resist it regardless of whether it held much ideological sympathy for the regime being threatened. Whilst the Labour leadership declared its support for working with liberal and progressive governments, it argued that it was sometimes compelled to accept "... dubious alliances with reactionary forces",[1] when Britain's security was threatened. The ambiguity in the situation, though, was never really resolved and led to great dissension within the Party. The eternal conflict between those who wished things to change and those who recognised unchanging realities.

In the Middle East too the Party leadership insisted that a precipitate withdrawal was unrealistic. It held the view that "Since none of the Middle Eastern countries possess armed forces capable of protecting themselves, their security against Soviet attack can only be assured by outside powers".[2] This did not amount to the belief by the leadership that Britain should retain her presence in the Middle East at all costs or irrespective of other considerations. In fact it argued that "If she (Britain) tries to maintain her position there without the consent of the local peoples the cost of doing so will soon become prohibitive. In any case it is doubtful whether the forces Britain can afford for Middle East defence, would be adequate should war come to that area."[3]

Nevertheless, in the main, it was clear that whereas post-colonial considerations dictated to Labour a policy of a phased and relatively rapid withdrawal, Cold War consideration, it was said, made such a withdrawal impossible.

[1] Foreword by Noel-Baker, P. Op. cit., p.22.

[2] Problems of Foreign Policy, 1952, p.13.

[3] Problems of Foreign Policy, 1952, p.14.

The cold war in fact had the effect of dramatising the evident divisions within the Party. During periods of world tension both wings were likely to fall out with considerable venom. The Right of the Party, including the Shadow Cabinet, favouring the creation of a universal balance of power, the Left, including the vocal elements in parliament and in the Party, believing that the only way to prevent a confrontation between the superpowers was to build up a block of neutral powers. While these different approaches were not clear-cut when the international situation was quiescent, an international crisis invariably inspired considerable lobbying on the Right in an effort to attract support for the West, and on the Left to mobilise those moral forces that supported a third force or neutralist line. These approaches were plainly irreconcilable and consequently clashes over Britain's East of Suez role were most acute at times of greatest international tension.

One reason for the abrasive nature of the conflict between Left and Right in the foreign policy field in general, was that there prevailed within the extra-parliamentary wing of the Party, the conviction that socialist principles were more operationally relevant within the domestic context than was the case in relation to the external environment where they would inevitably have to be diluted in order to accommodate the interests of other nations. This domestic introspection was justified by urging that a socialist Britain could serve as a model for the rest of the world. As the socialist union in its publication entitled *Socialism and Foreign Policy*, argued, there existed within the Labour Party no real agreement about the relevance of socialist principles in foreign

affairs, and concluded that "The struggle for socialism has become increasingly to mean the struggle for socialism at home; in foreign affairs the problem has been to survive."[1] The Left was horrified by the logic of this.

Neither would the left condone the use of military power in support of Labour's foreign policy conducted in a hostile environment. This became not only a major bone of contention between the wings of the Party, but it also carried overt and far-reaching implications for the East of Suez policy.

Labour's activist Left unswervingly adhered to the belief that "... military alliances and armaments were .... the sinister pre-occupation of Capitalist Governments"[2], but experience of coalition government between 1940-45 had indicated that if Labour gained power, or even if it were to behave as a responsible opposition, it could "... less and less dismiss the realities of foreign policy as the concern of Capitalists alone".[3] As a result "Armaments, military alliances and power strategy could no longer be rejected out of hand. The weapons condemned by earlier socialists were now - short of a new world order - perforce part of the Socialist armoury as well".[4] This realistic attitude and conversion to 'capitalist' ways were never accepted by the ultra-Left in both the extra-parliamentary and parliamentary wings of the Labour movement.

Labour in opposition could be expected to become less concerned with cold war power politics and more concerned with socialist principles, but this change of emphasis was only partially realised. The Korean War, however,

[1] Foreword by Noel-Baker, P. Op. cit., p.11.

[2] Foreword by Noel-Baker, P. Op. cit., p.13.

[3] Foreword by Noel-Baker, P. Op. cit., p.18.

[4] ibid.

was seen by the Labour Leadership not only as evidence of aggression by a small communist state, but also as a sharp reminder of the willingness of two great communist powers to support aggression by proxy. Moreover, the challenge in Korea could be the prelude to a Soviet attack in Europe. There was thus a reaction against any half-hearted commitment; this time collective security would have to be supported by the judicious use of armed force.

The Korean War also underlined the 'problem of China', and the Labour leadership took the view that "If China does attack Indo-China with immediate retaliation by the U.N., the whole principle of Collective Security will be destroyed, causing fatal damage to the prestige of the U.N. Moreover, a Chinese victory in Indo-China would leave the road wide open for further aggression in areas of great concern to Britain, like Burma and Malaya, with India to follow somewhat later".[1] Although the view that the principle of collective security would be destroyed by a Chinese intervention might not be self-evident, this argument represented Labour's realisation that the traditional imperial commitment had become a strategic necessity in the new post-colonial situation. Of course, this time national self-interest coincided with the genuine national aspirations of the oppressed masses struggling for post-imperial independence. That is Britain could help newly independent states retain their sovereignty and independence by guaranteeing their national security.

There are clearly two factors which affected the Labour Party's foreign policy in the early 1950s which ensured that these did not diverge all that much from that of their main political opponents.

[1] Problems of Foreign Policy. 1952, p.15.

[2] Problems of Foreign Policy, 1952, p.2.

Firstly, because the Conservatives' basic analysis of the cold war and of Soviet intentions were not noticeably different from those of the outgoing Labour Government, for Labour now to have taken a 'soft' view would have been to contradict its own decisions taken when in power. Secondly, in this period the threat to national security was perceived by both rival political elites to be such that it demanded national and bipartisan policies. During the early 1950s a bi-partisanship consensus on foreign policy thus existed without any formal agreement ever being overtly necessary. Both major party leadership elites shared the same basic values and beliefs.

Labour leaders, then, saw foreign policy problems in much the same way as the Conservative Party. Ernest Bevin, in his day, had talked about 'power vacuums' and 'Russian expansionism' in a strikingly traditional Tory manner; and now, in opposition, Labour continued to echo the Bevinite doctrine. It is true that the Party was still committed in principle to its paramount aim "... to replace the international anarchy by a world order and to build a system in which disputes between states would be settled by arbitration, under the rule of law and not by the clash of physical force"[1], but it did not deny the stark reality of the cold war, even though it continued to articulate its basic and fundamental socialist ideals. The external environment, however, had to determine policy and not ideology. Indeed ideology counted for less than the objective situation that the country found itself in.

Despite the Left's belief that the Labour leadership had abandoned socialist foreign policy principles, the parliamentary Left Wing was not

[1] Problems of Foreign Policy, 1952, p.2.

very active over the East of Suez issue during the 1950s. This was due to concern about other international issues like German rearmament and the ongoing war in Korea. At the 1952 Party Conference, a grass roots resolution called on the Government "... to withdraw all British troops and administrators from Malaya".[1] A similar, though more general resolution was called at the 1954 Conference, demanding "... the immediate withdrawal of all British troops from foreign occupation".[2] The following year a resolution was moved asking that, "This Conference, recognising that war is incompatible with socialism, declares its adherence to a policy of pacifism in foreign affairs".[3] And finally in 1956 Mr. G. Scott of the E.T.U. called for "the withdrawal of all armed forces from colonial territories".[4] Rejection of colonialism was combined with an emphatic denial of the utility of military force.

These resolutions were clearly doomed to failure. The reason for the singular lack of support for the withdrawal of British forces from colonial areas related to the attitude of the centrist Trade union leadership towards the Commonwealth connection. They wished to strengthen commonwealth ties where possible, and not only at the inter-governmental level, but with the Labour movement as a whole.

Moreover, fortuitously a large part of that faction of utopian socialists who were morally opposed to the use of force, and as such might be expected to oppose the East of Suez role, were also that element most attracted to the ideals underpinning the New Commonwealth. This led to a marked degree of ambiguity in the attitude of much of the Party; a

[1] Mr. J. K. Stocks (Edinburgh West C.L.P.) Labour Party Conference 1952, p.118.

[2] Mr. J. R. Pye (Harrow East C.L.P.) Labour Party Conference 1954, p.129. resolution lost.

[3] Mrs. B. K. Lowton (Epping C.L.P.) Labour Party Conference 1955, p.180. resolution lost.

[4] Mr. G. Scott (E.T.U.) Labour Party Conference 1956, p.163, resolution lost.

toleration of, rather than an enthusiasm for, the use of military power to sustain the Commonwealth was shared by the trade union movement, then under the influence of right-wing leaders, and was born more out of economic logic than political idealism. The trade union support for the East of Suez role was based on enlightened self-interest because of the belief that on balance the Commonwealth connection, not least because of the potential markets it offered, was essential to the balance of payments, full-employment and economic growth. However, this attachment to the Commonwealth was enormously strengthened by a suspicion of the trade union structure in Europe, and by a greatly exaggerated fear of cheap European labour. The trade unions in France were regarded by the moderate and orthodox British trade union leadership as ideologically aligned with the communists; and where they were not so aligned, as in the case of West Germany, they were regarded as acting in collusion with the employers, in a bid to discipline recalcitrant labour. British trade union leaders like Ernest Bevin and Arthur Deakin had considerable reservations about trade unionism on the continent; this somewhat spinsterish attitude towards their colleagues in Europe also reflected the insularity and conservative nature of the Labour movement towards issues in Europe which involved greater de facto collaboration with European trade unionists.

The failure of the trade union movement to find in Europe a source of inspiration, or indeed a market area where economic growth of considerable magnitude could bring up the living standards of the British working class, reinforced the persistent idea that British living standards depended on Commonwealth trade and investment. It was not until it was realised with incredulity that the French and certainly

the West German workers, were having a much better deal from their employers than their British counterparts; that superior welfare provisions and sickness benefits existed in those countries; and that wages and productivity were vastly better than in Britain with a much lower rate of inflation, that this anti-European attitude slowly diminished. However, it did not decrease significantly even when Britain took an official attitude towards the Treaty of Rome; (but that was, of course, over ten years later) and so in the 1950s the trade union leadership loyally supported the Commonwealth and the use of force in order to sustain it, if this proved necessary. Both Attlee and Gaitskell could rely upon the trade unions' block vote to sustain an orthodox policy East of Suez.

The official party line, though, did not get support only for economic or trade advantage. The main body of the Party - and this included the trade unions who under Arthur Deakin's tough leadership became a strong influence on the Labour leadership - knew even if somewhat intuitively that two major socialist principles, democracy and self-government, were involved East of Suez and that they could only be realised if Britain retained a military presence in the area during the post-colonial era. While certain ultra-Left wingers, as we have seen, wanted the latter principle pursued at almost any cost, the majority of the Party perceived the antithetical nature of the two principles and therefore accepted that there was a need to retain a military presence in colonial countries if the democratic process was to flourish, if self-determination was to mean anything. Labour's leadership feared that without British military support newly independent

states would succomb to predatory neighbours. Also a fear of a communist takeover was often expressed as well as a possible military takeover by ultra-nationalists.

Clearly the traditional socialist belief that 'nations would rather rule themselves badly than be ruled by outsiders' still persisted, but it was reluctantly recognised by a large majority in the Party that the politics of the colonial areas were rather more volatile and violent than this somewhat simplistic alternative postulated. The Labour leadership could agree that it was possible for a nation to gain formal independence "... while the individuals within it are deprived of the ordinary human rights - perhaps by a minority of another race within their midst, perhaps through a drastic deterioration of living standards, perhaps - if the country is weak - through being left defenceless before some new interloper".[1] This fear found recurrent expressions at party conference.

Those who wanted to withdraw from East of Suez were challenged in 1952 by James Griffiths, Labour's former colonial secretary, representing the National Executive, in a typically aggressive speech. "Let me ask all those delegates", he said, "who talk about leaving; if you leave, what do you leave behind? We could leave, and when we have left there is a vacuum.... If we left Malaya tonight it would not mean independence and democracy, but terrorist government."[2] Four years later Griffiths returned to his theme on the subject of Malaya. "Suppose we withdraw the troops, what do you think would happen? Democratic feedom? Socialism? What we want?" He left the Conference in no doubt about the answers to those questions. "The country would be overrun by a minority".[3] They

[1] Foreword by Noel-Baker, P. Op. cit., p.47.

[2] J. Griffiths (Nat. Executive) Labour Party Conference 1952, p.141.

[3] J. Griffiths (Nat. Executive) Labour Party Conference 1956, p.169.

faced, of course, that fate anyway since majorities rarely determine the behaviour of political elites but his point was strongly put that majority rule was the basic aim of Labour's policy.

The justification for the Malayan campaign was not then simply because it was in Britain's strategic interest, but because Britain was morally committed to create stable and viable independent nations out of the passing of the Empire. Moreover, the vast majority in the Labour Party at all levels considered that something rather special was being created. Dr. Hugh Dalton, a towering figure in the Labour leadership, spoke for this majority when he argued that "... Britain should put the Commonwealth before all other regional groupings, because this Commonwealth of ours has a number of unique and most valuable characteristics found in no other grouping, short of a world wide organisation."[1] A strong ideological commitment under-pinned the Commonwealth connection in Labour's ranks; the leaders of the Party shared this commitment as well.

These altruistic arguments were not propounded simply to gain support. The belief in an inherited debt, rather than self-interest, ran throughout the entire Party and reflected residual socialist values. Indeed throughout the intra-party debate on East of Suez it was clear that some embarrassment existed over talk of Britain's 'national interests' and most of the rhetoric by way of compensation centred rather uneasily on the interests of the incipient nation-states which Britain was self consciously creating in the name of self-determination.

There can, however, be no doubt that the Parliamentary critics of the East of Suez role were concerned about the 'national interest.' They firmly believed, for instance, that Britain could not afford the role, or at

[1] H. Dalton (Nat. Executive) Labour Party Conference 1952, p.113.

least should invest its diminishing resources more sensibly elsewhere. They could not however expect to get the same degree of influence over the Party in the 1950s as they had exerted in the 1930s. A socialist foreign policy based on pacifist opposition to armaments was, after the experience of appeasement, the collapse of collective security and the subsequent world war, now impossible. In Opposition, however, Labour could perhaps encourage a return to a more ideological foreign policy, but Bevin's ghost, and Labour's experience of office still cast a shadow - his traditionalism was by now the Party orthodoxy. It was clear also that Bevin's policy was the preferred one because the Labour leadership took the view that the ideology of social democracy was now under as grave a threat from totalitarian communism as had been the case when Hitler threatened the peace of Europe. However, the development of weapons of mass destruction, the nuclear missile arms race between the superpowers, also reinforced the utopian and marxist Left's critique of Labour's foreign policy consensus.

Therefore during the late 1950s there was a great upsurge in foreign and defence policy affairs within the Labour Party. This interest centred on the issue of nuclear war, but it carried far-reaching implications for the East of Suez role also.

It is not difficult to perceive why the fear of nuclear war increased in the late fifties. But fear of such a war forged an alliance within the Labour Party which included pacifists, neutralists, trade unionists and 'fellow travellers'. The great strength of the anti-war movement was its eclectic character: it was all things to all men. To

the pacifist it was a tentative step towards a disarmed world and the heady ground of world government, to the neutralist it was rejection once again of the cold war and a display of sentiment of neither attachment to the U.S.A. or U.S.S.R., to those who feared the growing anarchy of world politics this anti-nuclear lobby was a means of contracting out of entanglements and obligations, to those fellow-travellers in the Party whose sympathy lay with the U.S.S.R., it was the critical first step towards the dissolution of N.A.T.O., and of all military blocs, and to the trade unionist it was an acknowledgement of the importance of domestic affairs. The Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, a vast umbrella organisation, was not only of relevance for Britain's defence policy. There were far-reaching foreign policy issues at stake in the debate.

The Campaign was concerned with the future nature and character of Britain's foreign policy, for it attempted to re-define where Britain's interests and allies lay. The utopian and socialist Left's enthusiasm for the C.N.D. lay in the hope that the Labour Party would pursue a neutralist policy. If this had happened in the mid-sixties and Britain had become more aloof from the cold war, then the logic of an East of Suez presence would have been fundamentally weakened, and the withdrawal from East of Suez greatly accelerated.

Surprisingly, though, even in a rising climate of protest and dissent apparently so conducive to radicalism, the Labour Left never really launched a coherent or frontal attack on the world role. This was all the more perverse since all those on the left who supported the nuclear pacifism of the C.N.D. were likely also to support the anti-power logic of a 'socialist' foreign policy, and that included the abandonment

of the East of Suez role, together with rejection of the Anglo-American alliance, N.A.T.O. and the cold war. There was, though, an almost total obsession with nuclear strategy and consequently the Left's direct influence over the East of Suez issue was not as great as its position at the Labour Party Scarborough Conference appeared to infer. Yet one strand of the C.N.D. critique of Labour's policy was the argument advanced by Ted Hill of the Boilermakers' Union that the Commonwealth could institute the core of a third force in world politics led by a non-nuclear Britain. The Left in fact concentrated their efforts on the great domestic debate over socialist principles, and then became concerned with the nuclear controversy. In consequence the world role never became, for any length of time, a major controversy as between the wings of the Party because domestic politics together with concentration on the winning of political power through elections tended to defuse passionate interest in concerns affecting the external environment.

Nevertheless, while the Left was decidedly reluctant to concentrate its energies on dismembering the East of Suez role, it was clear that if the Party leadership itself showed any tendency to question that role it could count on considerable leftish support. This was important, for by the mid-fifties there began within Labour's higher echelons, almost in a conspiracy of silence, a questioning which over the next few years was to lead to a full re-appraisal of the world role, but not before significant changes in the external environment forced upon Labour leaders a new perception of realities.

This re-thinking involved some analysis of strategic, political and economic factors. The main strategic questions being posed were whether

Britain's presence East of Suez made her interests more secure; whether military force was in fact relevant to the problems facing that area; whether the threat to the status quo and local stability East of Suez had been correctly perceived and whether Britain had the capability to act East of Suez anyway. Moreover, there was a more crucial consideration arising in fact from the cost to Britain's balance of payments of a large presence East of Suez. However, the economic costs were difficult to calculate and could not yet prove decisive in determining policy.

Politically there were increasing doubts about whether Britain gained diplomatic kudos through her presence East of Suez and whether that presence was consistent with socialist morality which rejected so-called neo-colonialism. Did Britain's presence help to preserve her economic investments in the area (amounting to a considerable sum) and, if so, did such investments exceed the cost of their preservation?

These questions related principally to the Middle East which had traditionally been of enormous strategic significance for Britain. They had first been raised in the early 1950s when the Left as a whole had shown implacable opposition to the retention of a costly presence in Egypt, but they were more frequently posed after the abortive and tragic Suez operation in 1956. As a result of limited military operations in the area during 1957 and 1958, more general criticism of Britain's role in the Middle East were made. It was in fact a right-wing member of Labour's top echelons, the Right Hon. Kenneth Younger, who initiated the reassessment of that role. He argued that "Operations by Western Powers in Arabia are extremely invidious and have repercussions well

outside the local area... and I am not sure that it is justifiable, in these days, that purely British troops should be involved in this kind of operation".[1] His doubts were widely shared.

It was not long before the Labour's right-wing joined forces on the issue in the shape of the most persistent and persuasive critic of Britain's role East of Suez, Christopher Mayhew. His analysis carried influence because it was not advanced in doctrinaire terms, indeed he stressed a non-ideological stance, and it appeared to be a dispassionate, objective review of a part of British foreign policy that had remained largely unchallenged over the previous decade. His analysis was not in terms of the specific 'national interests' of Britain and of those nations whose independence Britain was supposed to be furthering.

Mr. Mayhew used, in 1958, the same arguments that he was to develop to much greater effect a decade later, and he sought to include Asia as well as the Middle East in his critique. In July of that year he insisted that "Those people do a bad service to their friends who lead them up the garden path into thinking that in certain circumstances they will support them with troops when it is not practicable to do so. I am talking not only about the Middle East, but of Asia as well".[2] Mr. Mayhew also questioned whether it was wise for outside powers, however powerful, to have forces in the Middle East. "The influence of the Soviet Union has grown immensely in the area" he argued "not because the Russians have landed troops anywhere, but, on the contrary, because they have not done so."[3]

In more liberal-democratic fashion, with residual respect for the doctrine of the non-interference in the affairs of small states, Mr. Mayhew

[1] Younger, K. Vol. 577, H. of C. 8th November, 1957. Col. 555.

[2] Vol. 592, H. of C. 22nd July, 1958, Col. 313.

[3] Vol. 592, H. of C. 22nd July, 1958, Vol. 314.

also referred to the potential immorality of the world role. "There are certain situations" he said "in which the sending in of troops is neither a moral obligation nor, in many cases, have we a moral right to do so."[1] This moral judgement was based on the traditional concern felt in the Labour Party, that British troops were being used in a reactionary role in trying to halt social progress. In the words of Aneurin Bevan "British troops ought not to be expected to risk their lives in order to maintain unpopular kings on their thrones".[2]

Mr. Mayhew, then, attacked Britain's world role on three distinct but inter-related levels. In the first instance he contended that Britain's presence could be counter-productive to her local allies by inducing a complacent attitude towards their security, secondly he questioned the relationship between a permanent military presence and the securing of diplomatic influence; and thirdly, he doubted the morality of military action East of Suez, given the far from disinterested British concerns for her economic investments and the colour of the skin of her soldiers.

However, despite Mr. Mayhew's forthright and wide-ranging critique, there existed a reluctance amongst Labour politicans to generalise about Britain's world role, and policy discussion centred mainly on particular operations in the Middle East. However, it is still perhaps possible despite such pragmatism to trace a distinct Labour view even at this early stage of the debate, through the Party's often passionate reaction to certain overseas crises where Britain, under a Conservative administration, had become involved.

[1] Vol. 592 H. of C. 22nd July, 1958, Col. 313.

[2] Vol. 594, H. of C. 30th October, 1958, Vol. 334.

The Labour Party, to put it no higher, showed a marked reluctance to condone the use of force in Suez, Jordan and other military operations prior to 1960. This reluctance was frequently expressed in frenetic language as Labour spokesmen vied with each other in a bid for greater moral virtue in condemning Tory policies. During the deployment of British troops in Jordan, Hugh Gaitskell however approached the issue dispassionately and argued that ..."he would be a bold man who would claim that the internal security of that country is any greater"[1] because of the presence of British troops seeking to maintain stability. Not only did the Labour leader doubt that this intervention in Jordan had done any good, but more generally argued that "... in trying to back some Arab States against others all that we do is to turn all of them against us".[2]

Mrs. Castle, whose emotional feelings put her to the left of Labour's leadership, also opposed the British deployment into Jordan,[3] and Mr. Mayhew was convinced that "When regimes like those in Jordon or the Lebanon .... cannot maintain themselves in their own countries, we only make bad worse by sending in our troops to prop them up".[4]

While Roy Jenkins, the spokesman for Eurocentric policies in the party doubted "... that there is any advantage in having client regimes in that part of the world",[5] Philip Noel-Baker, the ardent advocate of controlled and phased disarmament, was of the opinion that intervention in the Middle Eastern affairs only reinforced the "... Arab belief that

[1] Vol. 594, H. of C. 28th October, 1958, Col. 17.

[2] Vol. 594, H. of C. 18th October, 1958, Col. 18.

[3] Vol. 592, H. of C. 22nd July, 1958, Col. 294.

[4] Vol. 592, H. of C. 22nd July, 1958, Col. 313.

[5] Vol. 594, H. of C. 30th October, 1958, Col. 405.

we are against their unity", and made them think that "... we are ready to use force to keep in power Governments which we favour, however unpopular those Governments may be".[1] A suspicion that Britain backed reactionary regimes for strategic reasons rather than for the defence of democratic ideals appeared well-founded when later on, in July, 1961, Labour politicians expressed similar reservations about the operation in Kuwait.[2] This operation again appeared to Labour a good example of Britain's penchant for upholding the position of reactionary regimes.

While it is obvious that these reservations were no more than reactions to specific crises, a kind of crisis-management dialogue, when taken together they seemed to indicate a marked disenchantment, if not with the whole of Britain's world role, then certainly with a significant part of it. This changing mood was neatly expressed by the mercurial George Brown, the Party's spokesman on defence, who ruefully observed that: "It will obviously be true now that the old imperial commitment of which we talk so much ... will undergo a change. I believe that the effect of Suez and of the Congo, the effect of what immediately happens is to make a great change in the extent of the old imperial commitments. The chances of doing anything are so very much reduced because other forces come into play. World opinion comes into play. Other powers come into play, and one would have far less opportunity, even if one wanted, to carry out this old commitment in the future than one has ever had in the past. The second consideration which must be in our minds is that unless we got there extraordinarily quickly, whatever we wanted to do, other things would be there before us".[3] Although this passage

[1] Vol. 594, H. of C. 30th October, 1958, Col. 446.

[2] Vol. 645, H. of C. 31st July, 1961, Cols. 1048-9.

[3] Vol. 627, H. of C. 20th July, 1960, Col. 510.

of his speech was uncharacteristically obscure, the drift of Mr. Brown's argument was unmistakable. He saw the Suez and Congo operations, different in character though they were, as scenarios, even an admonishment that imperial powers could be confronted with new and abrasive environmental parameters which might seriously inhibit any military action contemplated in the future.

Mr. Healey, something of an academic strategist with a flair for analysis, who had already played a major role in the formulation of Labour's post-war foreign and defence policies, and who was later to become Shadow Defence Minister, joined the redoubtable Mr. Brown in this re-evaluation of the military and political assumptions which underlay Britain's world role. "The more one travels about the world", he said, "the more convinced one becomes that a large number of so-called commitments which the U.K. now carries outside the Continent of Europe are out of date and do not make sense in 1961 in either military or political terms. If we look at the military problem, I think we must agree that it is doubtful whether by 1970 this country will have any land bases abroad except in the white countries of the Commonwealth. It is probable that there will be a barrier to the flight of military aircraft stretching from the Soviet Union through the Middle East, through Africa, to the Atlantic".[1] He then went on, in a statement somewhat prophetic in character in the light of his own decisions nine years later, to look at the politico-strategic assessment. He concluded that in the light of Britain's experiences between 1956-58, "... there will be very few potential situations in which British military intervention would be

[1] Vol. 635 H. of C. 27th February, 1961, Col. 1234.

likely to produce political advantages greater than the certain disadvantages attending it".[1]

Mr. Healey also questioned the assumption on which he claimed Western policy, as a whole, was based, namely "... that we can prevent change by buttressing the status quo through alliances and large scale military aid".[2] He declared with characteristic hyperbole that the experience of the previous decade had shown that to be a 'fatal illusion'. In a similar vein he argued ".... that the old Dulles concept of protecting South East Asia from Communism by a military alliance of Western Governments and South East Asian Governments has grave weaknesses".[3] It was ironically on just such grounds that Aneurin Bevan, the chief left-wing intellectual and major dissident, had resigned from the Shadow Cabinet seven years previously. Although it is true that Mr. Healey regarded that resignation as having little to do with strategic analysis and rather more than personal ambition, Bevan's departure did dramatize the anxieties within the party about Britain's reliance on alliance politics.[4]

Christopher Mayhew too continued in the early 1960s with the kind of analysis he had been making, to some effect, in the late 1950s. But by now he was getting a rather better hearing from the utopian and socialist Left as well. He argued that there were certain political and strategic factors which had made some aspects of the East of Suez role obsolete, as well as dangerous, and he declared that "The argument that the mere presence of British troops in those places contributes to internal security

[1] ibid.

[2] Vol. 640, H. of C. 17th May, 1961, Col. 1408-9.

[3] Vol. 648, H. of C. 2nd November, 1961, Vol. 354.

[4] See Bevan's own account in his In Place of Fear.

and defence against aggression may have been true in past years, but it is not so self-evident today." "With emergent nationalism", he explained, "and with a vigorous anti-colonial crusade throughout the world it is no longer a safe assertion that the mere presence of British troops in a former Colonial Territory contributes to either internal security or defence against aggression".[1] Imperial nostalgia was now a silly Tory game, and therefore Mr. Mayhew chided those people who enjoyed looking at those maps showing "... our soldiers, sailors and airmen dotted round the globe, keeping these old imperial stations like their fathers and grandfathers before them."[2] Such maps while "heartwarming" did not, Mr. Mayhew asserted "belong to the realities of the world situation as we have it now." He believed that far-flung bases undermined Britain's efforts to win the trust of nationalism in Asia and Africa and answered "... the prayers of much Communist propaganda".[3] Communist subversives could become the chief beneficiaries of such British folly.

Mr. Mayhew spelt out the kind of pertinent questions to be answered: "What is the present role of the garrison based on Singapore? Is it the internal security role? If so, what are the likely political repercussions of the appearance of British troops in the streets of Singapore in support of the present P.M. Mr. Lee? Is the role that of defence of Malaya and Singapore? If so, how real is the immediate threat of external aggression on those territories? Does it justify a vast and expensive garrison base and installations? Would it not be

[1] Vol. 648, H. of C., 1st November, 1961, Col. 296.

[2] Vol. 635, H. of C., 28th February, 1961, Col. 1412.

[3] Vol. 635, H. of C., 28th February, 1961, Col. 1413.

better to do much more to shift the responsibility for the local defence to local shoulders in Malaya and Singapore?"[1]

The policy proposals which Mr. Mayhew recommended were bereft of coherence and detail, but he did, though, suggest that "... in a planned and phased manner, these commitments should be wound up"[2] and that it was plain that they "... must change over the years ahead".[3] When asked to say from where Labour would withdraw British troops. Mr. Mayhew adroitly referred to a speech made by Dennis Healey, and emphatically agreed with his colleague that by 1970 "there would be no bases outside the white parts of the Commonwealth."[4]

Britain's presence in the Middle East was also questioned on economic grounds, with Mr. Bevan insisting that Britain would "only be able to get oil from the Middle East safely and smoothly by commercial methods and by wise diplomacy and not by strong arm methods".[5] Thus even by 1961 it had become obvious that there was to be a protracted debate within the Labour Party over the East of Suez role which the Labour leadership had initiated in a fit of introspection, rather than in a determined bid to find as yet new policies. This debate was not a straightforward disagreement between the left and right wings of the party and raised a multiplicity of complex issues. Britain's role East of Suez, and particularly in the Middle East, was to be subject to further attack on political, strategic, economic and moral grounds. And in this debate socialist ideology became in a vague sense the yard-stick by which the left at least sought to establish the party's priorities. And yet though

[1] Vol. 648, H. of C., 1st November, 1961, Col. 296-7.

[2] Vol. 635, H. of C., 28th February, 1961, Col. 1413.

[3] ibid.

[4] Vol. 635, H. of C., 28th February, 1961, Col. 1414.

[5] Vol. 594, H. of C., 30th October, 1958, Col. 337.

this debate was not highly politicized, it did reveal a growing concern with environmental factors.

Indeed, these criticisms of the East of Suez role were not the orthodox ones, about overstretched resources, which opposition parties traditionally make. Those speeches of Mr. Healey, Mr. Brown and Mr. Mayhew, and even Mr. Bevan, seemed to indicate that Labour might propose and implement quite radical changes in foreign policy because it did not accept the bi-partisan consensus based upon an unchanging view of the external environment upon which hitherto policy had been based. These leaders called for change, substantial change indeed, it seemed, because they perceived changed political and military circumstances, rather than or as well as because they considered Britain's defence capability to be intrinsically deficient and overstretched by the demands of both a continental and maritime strategy. That had indeed always been so anyway, an historical hang-up of some standing which had divided political and military elites since the age of the Tudors.

These statements, then, seemed to indicate more a growing suspicion about the value of a world role, than concern about Britain's ability to sustain such a role. A piece of strategic analysis rather than an example of cost-benefit analysis which was now the greatly valued technique of any well-run defence Ministry. They related not to whether Britain could economically sustain the East of Suez role but to whether a military infrastructure overseas resulted in more tangible diplomatic influence, to whether such a presence upheld the status quo, and to whether Britain wished to uphold it. It would, though, be wrong and

facile to regard this fragmented dialogue as marking Labour's disillusionment with the East of Suez presence entirely. Indeed, to the contrary, it soon became plain that the greater threat to the World Role was precisely Labour's fear that Britain was overstretching herself at a time of growing and protracted crisis in Europe. It was not the changing evaluation of the East of Suez role which was crucial, but the changing perception of the strategic scene on the continent. The growing concern with the Berlin crisis raised anxieties amongst Labour's moderate parliamentary leadership at the level of the Shadow Cabinet. The Labour Shadow Cabinet genuinely felt that certain events East of Suez had diminished the value of the World Role, but it was never thought that these events in themselves ordained a precipitate withdrawal. The salient Labour criticism was not of the Worle Role itself but of the way it had been applied in specific crisis situations. It appeared therefore that if and when Labour came to power, the role would be defined and implemented in a different way, but would not be abandoned altogether. The Commonwealth might yet become a socialist club.

The truculent Russian diplomatic offensive in Europe 1958-61, however, put the imperial role in jeopardy, for there was no obvious disquiet that Britain might be bleeding her forces on the continent by meeting her inherited obligations East of Suez. It is perhaps too simplistic to assert that Labour's growing anxieties about East of Suez affairs were little more than a rationale for policy decisions taken because of the menacing European crisis, yet it was natural enough for those, on both the left and right of the Party, who wanted to buttress European security, to justify

a withdrawal of troops from East of Suez with the seductive argument that their presence in that area was no longer necessary. The near-panic the European crisis produced in Labour's divided ranks is perhaps evidence enough that this was in fact the case.

The Party's temporary concern for strategic issues, however, was at best blatantly spasmodic and could soon with rapidity lapse into periods of frightening indifference and prolonged inactivity. Indeed, even during the Russian political offensive over Berlin which carried both superpowers to the brink of disaster over Cuba (which was perhaps related to Khruschev's European strategy) in October 1962, it was right-wingers like Younger, Brown, Healey and Mayhew who managed to sustain a continuous and vigorous assault on the orthodox belief that Britain could fulfil all her commitments, both overseas and on the Continent. The remainder of the Party uninterested in, or unable to see, the relationship between defence and foreign policy, remained, except for the occasional flurry, largely bored or indifferent to the debate. It may be that if the Party had taken a greater and informed interest in defence policy, with the inevitable leftish inclined party conference prone to seek cut-backs in the field of defence, the move away from the East of Suez would have been more rapid, more far-reaching and less painful.

The ebullient but far-seeing George Brown was perhaps more deeply concerned than anyone else with the folly of what he termed the "... deployment of forces in peripheral wars". Wars which he clearly regarded as of secondary importance as compared with a continental commitment. "The British Army" he said "is not equipped and is not mobile enough

for peripheral wars .... It is no more in a position to fight a peripheral war than it is to do its job in Europe".[1] Mr. Brown's assessment of Britain's 'national interest' was clear. As long as 'peripheral' operations did not lead to a dereliction of European commitments they could be met, but in any serious conflict with European interests, those objectives East of Suez were clearly expendable. This contention was reinforced by the drift of external events as the situation in Europe deteriorated.

The ultra or neo-Marxist Left, too became more critical of the East of Suez role, for its fear was that the overstretch of British forces might lead to a dangerous reliance on a first-strike nuclear capacity or to a disagreeable return to conscription. Mr. Crossman, a critic of the right-wing leadership, and par excellence an intellectual, that is to say, he related his socialist beliefs to realities in an empirical fashion, warned that "If we do not want conscription to come back we shall have to cut our overseas commitments faster even than the P.M. is doing ..... because if there is one thing worse than cutting a commitment it is theoretically keeping it but not being able to fulfil it".[1] Indeed, commitments should never exceed capabilities because manifold weaknesses made Britain's "... promises valueless", Mr. Crossman advanced his prescription. "As a socialist", he said, "I see no difficulty in getting rid of a number of what I might call 'fag end' imperial commitments. I do not say all of them, but in my view a great many of these commitments bear no military reality at all.

[1] Vol. 635, H. of C., 28th February, 1961, Vol. 1436.

I do not believe that in any future war the security of Australia and New Zealand would be assisted from this country by a base in Singapore. I do not see us playing a role in Far Eastern strategy with the kind of forces the Government intend to have. It makes no sense at all".[1]

If such a strategic posture made no sense in early 1961, before a major shift occurred in the central power balance with the Soviet Union's attempt to achieve strategic parity, it was to make even less sense as the situation in Europe became more serious.

As the European crisis reached its height the demand for a review of Britain's overseas commitments increased. Mr. Brown in a speech emphasizing the weakness of B.A.O.R., was emphatically clear about what should be done. "We must both cut some of our commitments out" he said "and we must alter the method of covering others. One could in fact cover the Far East commitments as easily seaborne as landborne.... We have 20,000 soldiers or thereabouts in Singapore and Hong Kong. A lot of these would be an enormous help in other problems. We have blocks of soldiers elsewhere, and it is very difficult to see what their real purpose would be if they had to do the job which, one assumes, they are there to do.... My view is in the present political circumstances that the European theatre must have first place."[2] In Mr. Brown's view a continental strategy came first in Britain's defence priorities.

It must be remembered that this speech was in response to the Government's proposals revealed in the Queen's speech to hold back national servicemen for an extra six months. Mr. Brown vigorously

[1] Vol. 635, H. of C. 28th February, 1961, Col. 1437.

[2] Vol. 648, H. of C. 1st November, 1961, Col. 186-7.

opposed this solution to the defence manning problem. He maintained strongly that B.A.O.R. was poorly equipped and undermanned because of the "... clear failure to answer the question about commitments, priorities and purpose"[1]. According to Mr. Brown the situation could only be eased if the Government "... bring in some of the large garrisons which are sited in quite inappropriate places".[2] When asked if he was referring to Hong Kong, Mr. Brown replied that "We have too many forces there".[3] To the Eurocentric right of the party the open-ended commitment East of Suez had become a dangerous liability.

Mr. Paget, the hard-line Shadow Minister for the Army, having already expressed his conviction that Europe was Britain's first priority,[4] also attacked those who allowed the East of Suez role to make such a severe drain on Britain's resources. He was quite specific where he would make savings. "The first place I would look at is Hong Kong".[5] "Next we come to Singapore, which is really a garrison masquerading as a base .... Singapore is entirely dependent on a local labour force; and in that force I am told that at the lowest estimate there are 5,000 dedicated Chinese Communists and it is quite impossible to identify which is which. I do not know how we can work, how we can perform treaty obligations directed primarily against the Chinese, with that sort of set-up. In any event, I do not believe that we shall be there for very much longer. Malaya has been developing her own army, and we shall not have to be there for internal security reasons. In relation to these new

[1] Vol. 648 H. of C. 1st November, 1961, Col. 181.

[2] Vol. 655 H. of C. 6th November, 1962, Col. 324.

[3] ibid.

[4] Vol. 655 H. of C. 8th March, 1962, Col. 672.

[5] Vol. 655 H. of C. 8th March, 1962, Col. 622.

emergent countries, the sooner that sort of thing happens the better".[1] Mr. Brown clearly meant by "that sort of thing "the development of an indigenous military capacity which allowed Commonwealth countries to free themselves of a dependance upon Britain. In fact, a dramatic escalation of British force levels in the Far East was taking place, as confrontation with Indonesia assumed menacing proportions.

Nor was Aden spared. Mr. Paget refused to accept the argument that oil made Britain's presence necessary and concluded that it was "... highly important that as these new nations emerge we should go".[2] Christopher Mayhew also returned to the charge when he too insisted that "We (Britain) must, if we are to have an effective Rhine Army, review our commitments outside Europe".[3] He explained the manpower shortage, by accusing the Conservatives of taking the "... popular and easy" measure of abolishing conscription, but not the "... unpopular and hard job..." of cutting down overseas commitments. It was, he argued, because the Conservatives shirked this action that Britain was "... in this mess now".[4]

The deep contradiction between Britain's maritime and continental roles, in the form of a competition for seriously limited resources, had become an incotrovertable fact in the late 1950s. It is nevertheless true that each role had its own advocates, within the Labour movement, throughout that period and that it was not always a straightforward disagreement between the left and the right.

[1] Vol. 655 H. of C. 8th March, 1962, Col. 625.

[2] Vol. 655 H. of C. 8th March, 1962, Col. 626.

[3] Vol. 648 H. of C. 1st November, 1961, Col. 295.

[4] Vol. 648 H. of C. 1st November, 1961, Col. 289.

Throughout the 1950s, the heirs of the Bevinite tradition within the Labour Party had consistently upheld the notion that the nation's prestige would be enhanced by sustaining a world role, and that if Britain wanted to minimise the risk of United States' irresponsibility in Asia she must maintain a presence in that area. Another faction within the party, the very influential Eurocentric group centred on those in favour of British membership of the E.E.C. while agreeing that the United States, although dependable in Europe, might be reckless in Asia, argued that the way to retain influence over the United States was to engender closer ties through defence integration with Europe and to have Britain's independent nuclear deterrent absorbed into a N.A.T.O. structure. These early adherents to Europeanism, but not a third force Europe, concluded that, if Britain performed a specialist function in Europe, her standing in the United States would also improve. In addition, there existed both a latent but very real fear of Germany and the Soviet Union, as well as a growing awareness of the dynamic economic impact of the European Economic Community, which had now emerged as a major factor in international politics.

Although the influence and balance of strength between the Europeanists and Atlanticists seemed in the late 1950s to be moving in favour of the former, this did not mean the search for purely European solutions as the parochial nature of French Europeanism was not yet apparent. In any event, the pro-European faction in Labour's ranks were generally anti-Gaullist in outlook. Even if Labour wanted to circumscribe the World Role and to re-define the Anglo-American connection,

a universal balance of power with particular emphasis on N.A.T.O., would still remain as the core element for the leadership. Indeed, apart from the neutralist Left, those members of the Labour Party clustered around the leadership on the National Executive Committee and in the Parliamentary Party, wanted to limit the East of Suez commitment, and desired to do so largely to strengthen N.A.T.O.s capabilities against a possible rampant Soviet advance into Western Europe. Why, though, had there been no significant conflict between European and Atlanticist policies previously within the Labour movement? This question relates to the nature of the external environment rather than to different ideological interpretations of policy on the British left.

It had not been too demanding for Britain to pursue both maritime and continental roles before 1958. She sabotaged E.D.C. by diplomatic stealth in giving it luke-warm support which made it certain that the French National Assembly would reject the idea. Then Britain was ready with the idea of a loose Western European Union (WEU) which enabled Britain (and Germany) to make a contribution to European defence under the Paris agreements. Britain preferred an inter-governmental arrangement to a possible supra-national one. The re-arming of Germany, although making a British commitment to Europe necessary, also released resources and men for a more credible continental strategy if any real desire existed to develop one. Conservative Governments, however, during the 1950s, moreover, did not appear too anxious about being unable to fulfil Britain's 'unprecedented commitment' to the continent. This attitude was quite traditional. There were, after all, not only good economic reasons for not

observing this commitment beyond that of a two-division Rhine Army, but also the strategic rationale that deterrence would be weakened if conventional forces were increased. The nuclear threshold must be kept as low as possible because Britain had no wish to contribute a large army to the defence of Europe. In any case, although Britain did not reach the proposed force levels in Europe, which the NATO Council recommended at Lisbon in 1952, European security continued intact.[1] The Russians seemed pre-occupied with events outside Europe and the United States' deterrent policy remained feasible while her homeland could not seriously be threatened. This position lasted until at least 1960 when the flexible response strategy replaced the doctrine of massive retaliation as set out by Defence Secretary, Robert McNamara at Ann Arbour in 1962.[2]

Britain's continental role during the early 1950s was not, then beyond being met by the deployment of existing resources, and the same was true of East of Suez, where commitments had rarely become simultaneously active. The Chiefs of Staff, in the thirties, and, now in the fifties, feared that both commitments might one day be activated together, but the intrinsic dichotomy between these two roles could persist for the time being.[3] However, as this analysis has made clear, the Labour Party both in Opposition and power, though divided over the question of Britain's external role, was generally predisposed towards accepting the imperial commitment. Labour took the view that existing responsibilities could and should be met. The overwhelming impression emerges that both the left and right within the Labour Party accepted that Britain was still a great

[1] Ismay, Lord NATO: The First Five Years 1949-1954, pp. 20-56.

[2] See McNamara, Robert. The Essence of Security, New York, 1968, pp.51-67.

[3] See general discussion of this historic problem in Howard, Michael, The Continental Commitment, 1971.

power, albeit one in decline. The nation's role East of Suez was not to be disavowed by Labour. The ideology of Labourism was now strongly influenced by the revisionist doctrine which associated with the social-democratic wing of the Party, proved decisive in shaping the Party's foreign and defence policies.

C H A P T E R IV

EXTERNAL/INTERNAL FACTORS: THE LEVEL OF PERCEPTION IN LABOUR'S SEARCH FOR A DEFENCE POLICY CONSENSUS IN OPPOSITION

It was strange that the most determined opposition to the East of Suez role should break out between 1960-62, at a time of comparative British inactivity overseas and consequently at a time when the East of Suez role appeared nominal. Apart from assisting the U.N. in the Congo, and the operation in Kuwait, British troops were only involved in helping populations stricken by floods or hurricanes.

It is difficult to account fully for this lull in operations overseas, but there were five possible explanations. Firstly, the Soviet Union was pre-occupied with events in Europe. Mr. Krushchev's political offensive was at its height. Secondly, Duncan Sandys' 1957 Defence White Paper had placed a greater reliance on nuclear weapons. This reliance on the doctrine of massive retaliation made possible by the deployment of the 'V' bomber force was a calculated bid to deter the Soviet Union from any sort of aggression. This tended to subdue great power relations by inducing extremities of cautious or diplomatic brinkmanship which although alarming to see were actually vicarious means through which actual conflict was avoided. Thirdly, conscription had been abolished in 1957 and the last conscripts were called up during 1960. Thus an attempt was made in terms of staff planning in relation to conflict situations, to scale down the operations which might demand the use of scarce troops. Fourthly, the experience of Suez had encouraged Britain

in a more moderate if not more liberal policy towards her colonies and clearly the colonies themselves were impressed with the 'wind of change' mentality that was sweeping through British politics. Fifthly, there was a growing doubt at the level of the Chiefs of Staff about operations based on sea transport supplemented by air, and this was only slowly giving way to more optimistic assessments about the possibilities of operations using air transport supplemented by amphibious forces.[1]

All these factors, were responsible for the welcome lull in British overseas operations. However, because or despite of this interlude in military operations overseas Labour attacked the East of Suez role with a growing abrasiveness and coherence which even approached a degree of party unity on the subject.

Clearly, an anti-East of Suez impetus had been built up within the Labour Party since the Suez operation of 1956. The Suez operation in the autumn of 1956, together with the outrage of the Soviet invasion of Hungary had made a vivid and lasting impression on Labour, which even exceeded the feelings generated by the Munich agreement some eighteen years earlier.[2]

Yet, Labour's growing opposition to the East of Suez role also expressed its concern that the East of Suez presence was absorbing too large a share of the defence budget and the wrong deployment of conventional forces which were badly needed in Europe. It had been partly in a desperate bid to avoid a vast build up of arms

[1] See Williams, Geoffrey and Williams, Alan, op. cit. p.59.

[2] The Labour Government returned in March 1966 reluctantly rejected backbench pressure for a parliamentary inquiry into Eden's handling of the Suez crisis of October 1956.

and men, and to get defence 'on the cheap', that N.A.T.O. Europe in 1953 had embraced with alarm and concern the American doctrine of massive retaliation. However, Labour's parliamentary spokesmen increasingly came to perceive that the real weakness of this doctrine was that it had not in fact deterred Soviet backed aggression and, in Korea in 1950, or elsewhere since, for Britain particularly, was largely irrelevant as she was mainly faced with the task of keeping internal peace for nations East of Suez, rather than with deterring external aggression.[1]

The continued credibility of massive retaliation, moreover, was dependent on the relative and absolute invulnerability of the United States' homeland. This invulnerability ceased to exist after 1957. Consequently, in the late 1950s there was a move towards a new strategic doctrine based on a flexible response which Labour officially welcomed.[2] This new doctrine, however, seemed likely to put even more strain on Britain's dwindling resources. The official Labour leadership agreed with the government's assessment that the West must now have sufficient conventional forces to meet, at a corresponding level, any degree of Soviet aggression in Europe. Labour thus welcomed greater reliance on non-nuclear forces and at the same time endorsed the ending of conscription in Britain with real enthusiasm.[3]

Ironically the decision to abolish conscription in the White Paper of 1957 was just beginning to have an impact at a time when the strategic assumptions on which it was based, were being increasingly undermined.

[1] See general discussion in Brown, Neville. Arms Without Empire, 1967.

[2] Arguably the Labour leadership had been persuaded by John Strachey's Study on the Prevention of War, which warmly endorsed a change in NATO's local strategy in favour of a more flexible capacity to respond to aggression.

[3] See, Policy for Peace, statement endorsed at Blackpool Conference 1961, quoted in Twelve Wasted Years, Labour Party Research Department, 1963

This contradiction in Labour's position was not acknowledged by its spokesmen and yet there was, it seemed, a high probability of a gross manpower shortage at a time when conventional, and not nuclear, forces were to form the basis of a new strategic doctrine. Labour anyway had for some time been sceptical about the use of nuclear weapons as well as anxious about their impact on exposed populations, and by 1960 it appeared utterly convinced about the impossibility of threatening a first strike against anyone. "There is no territory or power so small or unimportant today that cannot invoke powerful friends",[1] warned George Brown.

The passing of massive retaliation and the decision to abolish conscription, then inevitably put a premium on conventional forces. Moreover, the painful but necessary transition to an all regular force coincided with exploding tension in Europe which culminated with the sudden erection of the Berlin Wall in late 1961. At the Blackpool Conference in October 1961 Labour passed a motion which inter alia condemned "the action of the Communists in arbitrarily closing the frontier between East and West Berlin."[2] The Europeanist case for a positive response hardened as the situation on the continent grew more grave, although in fact N.A.T.O.'s response was confused and appeared even weak. At a time when the West had decided to ensure that it could meet any Soviet military moves in a flexible manner, it was now being called upon to react to a prolonged European crisis. This crisis conceivably took the world to the brink of nuclear war. Labour's belief

[1] Vol. 627 H. of C. 20th July, 1960, Col. 508.

[2] Labour Party Conference Report, 1961, p.218.

however in the need for European defence based upon greater non-nuclear component reflected not merely changes in the external environment as well as changes in the technology of modern warfare but anxieties about the risks of mass obliteration.

The Left became even more concerned with the dangers of nuclear war in Europe. The Labour movement lurched towards a dangerous split. In passionate speeches in the House of Commons Labour's leadership opposed the purchase of Polaris and Skybolt on the grounds that it might lead to a vast and uncontrollable proliferation of nuclear weapons. General Norstad, as N.A.T.O. Supreme Commander, insisted upon a build up of missiles in Europe capable of delivering nuclear weapons. This call brought forth a flood of pent-up anger giving expression to intense anxiety within the Party. According to Dennis Healey, Norstad's argument was 'lunacy', an assertion which caused great consternation in N.A.T.O. Labour, in a rare show of unity, spoke with great feeling and conviction on the need to raise conventional strength in order to down-grade a dangerous and stupid over-reliance on nuclear weapons.[1] It was thus not surprising that some Labour spokesmen looked anxiously at those troops being 'squandered' East of Suez, and whose presence in Europe could ensure the peace of the world. Labour's strategic analysis concerning the use and deployment of nuclear weapons was combined with its growing reservations about Britain's role East of Suez.[2]

There was after 1958 a certain inevitability in the tension between Britain's maritime and continental roles. While there was no common

[1] Twelve Wasted Years, op. cit., p.396.

[2] ibid., p.398.

explanation for the fact that the factors that made for tension occurred simultaneously, there was sufficient coincidence after 1957 to undermine Britain's attempt to pursue both roles. None of these factors was more critical or significant than the marked and irreversible trend towards greater Soviet military capability, which provided not only the springboard for her political offensive in Europe, though prematurely since Soviet strategic power was still deficient when measured against the United States, but at the same time, impaired the credibility of the existing American nuclear commitment to the continent. Moreover, as important as the pressing need for Britain to find more conventional forces in accord with the new American strategic doctrine was the psychological consequence of Soviet pressure, which encouraged political elites in the West to look exclusively at the European crisis and seemingly ignore the Middle East and South East Asia where in fact even greater turmoil was threatened.

The crucial debate within the Labour leadership on the respective merits of the East of Suez and European roles took place against an emotional backcloth of unilateralism and widespread fear of a nuclear holocaust.[1] Though Hugh Gaitskell ensured that unilateralists, after their spectacular victory in 1960, suffered a dramatic setback in 1961, they remained throughout the early 1960s an emotional force to be reckoned with in left-wing politics and, in fact, underscored, in an obvious way, both the character and extent of Britain's participation in the cold war.[2] In the eyes of many of the anti-nuclear pacifist left within the Party, the East of Suez role was inextricably bound up with the cold war and was

[1] The Pursuit of Peace, op. cit. p.1-3.

[2] See Taylor, A.J.P., The Great Deterrent Myth, CND Pamphlet, 1960 for a lucid discussion of the case for a neutralist foreign and defence policy.

an offence to their anti-American sensibilities because it appeared that Britains and Americans were acting in collusion in the Far East.

The East of Suez role was thus, in the late 1950s and early 1960s under attack from both right and left, though for entirely different and contradictory reasons. While the right criticised the role for absorbing valuable resources of men and weapons which could otherwise be deployed in the more strategically significant and more seriously threatened European theatre, the Left opposed the role because it was convinced that it was both the cause and effect of the cold war, and that the post-imperial commitment was essentially a fraudulent exercise whose real purpose was to shackle the indigenous masses to a corrupt alliance of capitalist powers.

Labour's shrill insistence that British forces in Europe should be augmented by a cutback in overseas commitments, led the Conservative Minister of Defence, Mr. Watkinson, abrasively to declare that Labour's policy was one of "... retreat from our overseas commitments, except for N.A.T.O."[1] There was, however, no question of the need for an early withdrawal from East of Suez. For while Patrick Gordon Walker, Labour's spokesman on defence, rather dryly observed that he could not see "... the strategic relevance of troops in Hong Kong" the future leader of the opposition and later British Premier, Harold Wilson, was pontificating about withdrawing from that colony in tones which indicated a different approach,"... we could cut down",he conceded,"on our commitments East of Suez, but I should like to enter a personal caveat and a personal warning,from my own little knowledge, against going too far in Hong Kong.

[1] Vol. 655 H. of C., 6th March, 1962, Col. 336-7.

[2] Vol. 655 H. of C., 5th March, 1962, Col. 69.

This is not because of the danger of invasion, where our existing forces would be derisory but because of the danger of communal riots, perhaps Communist-inspired"...[1] Mr. Wilson at any rate did not consider that "... British soldiers are far too precious today to be used as policemen".[2] And here in this speech was neatly encapsulated another strand in Labour's pre-occupation with imperial concerns - the contribution to local stability. It was to be an argument about which a lot more was to be heard.

Whilst Labour's anxieties about the East of Suez role between 1958-61 had been induced by concern over whether Britain had sufficient military and perhaps economic strength to maintain both a European and a World role, after 1961 the East of Suez presence was subject to a fundamental assessment resulting from a value change in regard to these roles. The political and economic consciousness of Europe was growing at the expense of the Commonwealth in the minds of Labour's top leadership even though Hugh Gaitskell had considerable personal reservations about the political character of the E.E.C.

A political shift in favour of Europe manifested itself in 1961 with the application to join the E.E.C., but which in reality started much earlier. It originally began in 1959 when the Conservatives won a brilliant landslide electoral victory on the strengh of the 'never had it so good' slogan. With the economic situation suddenly deteriorating shortly after Mr. Harold Macmillan's triumph and with the nation eager to sustain the newly found affluence of the late 1950s, a number of new economic options were eagerly examined. The British Treasury's attention

[1] Vol. 655 H. of C., 6th March, 1962, Col. 226.

[2] Vol. 655 H. of C., 5th March, 1962, Ccl. 69

immediately settled on the Common Market. They urged immediate British membership.

The record of the E.E.C., in marked contrast to the gloomy predictions of successive British governments was spectacularly good and there was growing influential support for the view that strong and sophisticated economies had a good deal more in common than they had with developing economies. Even the Labour Party, despite its traditional suspicion of continental government, and of powerful economic groups clustered round vast private enterpises, seemed likely to submit to the 'irresistible logic' of joining the E.E.C.

The Party had major reservations. The activists on the marxist and utopian left were particularly concerned about the right wing orientation of continental politics, about the potential threat to collectivism and economic planning and about the fragmented political culture of Western Europe. While the Trade Union Congress were apprehensive about whether a British Government would be allowed to take measures to ensure full employment and guarantee restrictive practices, those in the centre of the Party, including some elements in the social democratic ranks of the P.L.P., while sharing many of the above anxieties, were also concerned about parliamentary sovereignty inside Europe (the ending of 'a thousand years of history') and about Britain's freedom to conduct a separate foreign policy.[1]

The Common Market debate clearly cut across orthodox divisions within the Labour Party at any rate at the outset. While certain unions expressed anti-European feelings - a concern at the potential influx of labour from Italy and France[2] and a hope of preserving the

[1] See National Executive's statement of September 1962 which laid down five essential conditions for entry of which item two insists upon "freedom as at present to pursue our own foreign policy."

[2] Gooch, E., M.P., (Nat. Union of Agricultural Workers) Labour Party Conference, 3rd October, 1962, p.177.

Commonwealth, "... this unique politically priceless multinational system of ours...", other unions had for some time supported the idea of closer economic ties with the continent. Even the Left Wing was divided, a split occurred between the anti-monopolist and the utopian internationalist pacifist left, for while it consistently opposed the extent of Britain's military commitment to Europe, it was undecided on the Common Market question.

The official party line, brilliantly underlined by Hugh Gaitskell at the 1962 Party Conference in a powerful anti-market speech, was equivocal. Britain should enter Europe, only if a number of safeguards for her agriculture, economy, Commonwealth, parliamentary institutions and E.F.T.A. friends were met. The T.U.C. was similarly cautious; it too had conditions which must be fulfilled. Both the political and industrial wings of the Labour movement were uncertain and confused about Europe and Britain's role East of Suez.

Nevertheless, in spite of these widely held reservations, the Europeanists within the Party seemed to be a rising force. Mr. Roy Jenkins and Mr. George Brown, completely abandoning their earlier caution, were the main protagonists of the need to re-define the Commonwealth connection. "For all that sentiment and all that Commonwealth emotion" said Mr. Brown "they (Commonwealth countries) are not slow in looking after their economic interests even at our expense when they need to .... But it is a wee bit hard... for them then to use the Commonwealth emotion to deny us the opportunity seriously to consider our economic interest."[2] Mr. Jenkins also shrewdly warned "... against the danger that by taking up too rigid

[1] C. Jenkins (A.S.S.E.T.) Labour Party Conference, 5th October, 1961. p.214. From resolution 321 calling for a rejection of the Common Market on the basis of the Treaty of Rome, and for greater trade with the Commonwealth.

[2] Labour Party Conference, 5th October 1961, p.226.

an attitude now we might in a few months time find ourselves more pro-Commonwealth interests than the Commonwealth itself."[1]

Those nagging negative fears about the continental commitment apparent between 1958-61, were now being transformed into positive hopes for an expanding and unified European Common Market. This growing conviction was just as serious, and perhaps as enduring a threat to the world role as the fear for European security. The twin goals of national security and national prosperity are inextricably intertwined. Whereas, prior to 1961, Labour's conviction, that Britainwas powerless to defend her vital national and alliance interest in Europe, had led to the call for a cut in commitment East of Suez, after 1961, it was clear that the call for greater economic growth was the major determinant of policy. The growing importance of Europe and the diminishing importance of the Commonwealth logically and inevitably led to calls for an adoption of a Eurocentric defence policy with demands for a withdrawl from East of Suez. Thus, while in the first case, prior to 1958, Labour's defence policy documents reflected a domination of foreign policy issues, after 1961 there existed a marked tendency for foreign policy documents to dominate defence policy statements. The result was the same though. A move in emphasis from East of Suez to Europe. A sea-change was occurring.

The reassessment of Britain's East of Suez role by the Labour Party achieved not through the Transport Houseresearch department but tentatively begun by Kenneth Younger in 1958, seemed to be in its terminal stages by 1962. A change of policy seemed so inevitable and desirable that most of the Party's Leaders felt able to embrace the new

[1] Labour Party Conference, 3rd October, 1962, p.173.

line with growing conviction and enthusiasm. Messrs. Brown, Jenkins and Healey, Crossman and Mayhew and Gordon Walker, had all expressed far reaching criticism of the World role in one context or another. So much so, in fact, that Mr. Watkinson, the Minister of Defence, remarked, no doubt genuinely, on his astonishment in listening "... to speech after speech from Opposition benches apparently implying that we can now lightly abrogate our treaty responsibilities everywhere in the world except in Europe."[1] Mr. Wilson's position though remained noticeably ambivalent. His stance remained devious.

The period 1963-64 demanded greater internal self-discipline and cohesion from the Labour Party than at any time since 1931 and yet it was one of great upheaval. An old leader had tragically died and a new one somewhat hesitantly chosen. It was to be expected, though, that the period of debate and unrest and indeed great passion within the Party would cease, that ranks would stolidly close behind the new incumbent and that new and specific policies would be produced before the eagerly awaited general election was upon the Party. The choice of Harold Wilson as Leader of the Party however reinforced those within the Party anxious for whatever reason to keep Britain East of Suez, an issue on which he felt so vehemently and on which he plainly had differences with his colleagues.

Throughout the early part of 1963 however, the assault on the world role continued unabated. While Denis Healey thought that Britain's overseas interests were "... less than vital"[2], Mr. Brown believed there to be "... fewer and fewer places left in the world - shortly no place

[1] Vol. 635 H. of C., 28th February, 1961, Col.1508.

[2] Vol. 673 H. of C., 4th March, 1963, Col. 57.

at all..." where Britain would play a "... role as an individual nation."[1]

Mr. Wilson, who was to become leader of the Party in February, in fact the second leader since the departure of Attlee, however, took a very different line from that of his colleagues.[2] He reminded the House how a year previously he had warned ".... against the facile assumption that we can solve our problems by depleting our garrisons in other parts of the world".[3] He also made it clear that if Britain were to sacrifice any role it should be the nuclear and not the East of Suez one.[4] However, while Harold Wilson's personal position was gaining in clarity, and strength, the Party's naturally enough, was becoming more confused and muted.

During 1964 Mr. Wilson decided to push his own view. He wholeheartedly supported the pledge given to Malaysia by the Conservatives, and in a more general statement on East of Suez, having repeatedly emphasized that he was only expressing a personal view, he said that he would "... regard 1000 men East of Suez as preferable to another 1000 in Germany",[5] an astonishing piece of strategic illiteracy according to his critics. The difference between Mr. Wilson and most of the other top labour men was that while they all feared that Britain's existing military effort was largely irrelevant to the kind of threats posed to British security, the resonse they advocated was very different to that advanced by their new Leader. Mr. Wilson emphasized the neēd to alter and raise capability to meet obligation, however open-ended that obligation appeared to be, while others placed more emphasis on the need to decrease commitment

[1] Vol. 673 H. of C., 5th March, 1963, Col. 325.

[2] Mr. Wilson had become Labour's spokesman on foreign affairs in the autumn of 1961 when he moved from the shadow chancellorship.

[3] Vol. 670 H. of C., 31st January, 1963, Col. 1244. Later on Mr. Wilson demonstrated his approval of a speech made by Edward Heath which expressed fears about Chinese aggression in S.E.Asia. Vol.680 H. of C. 2nd July 1963, Col. 223.

[4] Vol. 670 H. of C., 31st January, 1963, Col. 1244.

[5] Vol. 687 H. of C., 16th January, 1964, Col. 450.

and if necessary decrease it further still. It was Mr. Wilson's view that prevailed if not his folly. This is demonstrated by the marked contrast in statements made by Labour leaders in 1964 compared with those made a year or two earlier. No longer was the emphasis on cutting commitments but on re-shaping a conceivably greatly expanded capability. The justification for this change in emphasis was that the danger of war outside Europe was growing. An assertion often made without strong evidence being produced unless it was the fear of encroaching insurgencies in Asia which could have a domino effect on the survival of pro-Western states in the area. Mr. Wilson was indeed of the opinion that "if India and Malaysia go under or fail to make the breakthrough they seek in democratic economic development, then Asia goes under with them, beyond the hope of Western intervention".[1]

Mr. Healey elaborated on this explanation. "All of us believed", he said, "that Britain's military commitments overseas would be reduced by the end of our old Empire and the creation of an independent Commonwealth, but in fact, the military burden falling on us has, if anything, increased in recent years".[2] Whether the apparent policy change could be attributed to the prospect of a general election; to the dramatic and largely unforseen events in Kenya, Uganda, Tanganyika, Zanzibar, Malaysia and India; to growing concern about the strategic position in Europe, or to Mr. Wilson's own somewhat traditional but certainly idosyncratic views pervading the Party, is difficult to determine, but the change was as dramatic as it was relatively sudden. Overnight explicit opinions were disavowed. Mr. Healey, who it can be remembered had earlier seen

[1] Speech at Bridgeport University, U.S.A., 3rd March, 1964.

[2] Vol. 696 H. of C., 17th June, 1964, Col. 1287.

political and military changes which would soon make British action overseas unfeasible, now argued with considerable emphasis and aplomb that "... the main weight of Britain's military efforts should now be overseas..."[1] and that the number one defence priority was "... in providing mobile, conventional forces to assist in maintining stability in Africa and in Asia..."[2] Even more surpising was that he welcomed the fact that Britain was "... the only country in a position to fulfil such responsibilities..."[3] Labour's new-found enthusiasm for local stability in Asia and Africa constituted the core of the moral commitment to a role East of Suez.

It was noticeable that Mr. Mayhew, a critic of the East of Suez role, took no part in the defence debates of 1964, and Mr. Brown an ardent Europeanist directed his gaze in the direction of nuclear policy. Harold Wilson, who initiated and indeed inspired the new policy, and Denis Healey, because he found it relatively easy to adapt it to the requirements of Labour defence strategy, now became Labour's main spokesman on the East of Suez issue. These two policy-makers however retained a marked attitude towards this so-called new contribution to the defence of British national interests and repeatedly condemned on moral, political and economic grounds the use of troops in pursuit of mere economic interests[4] and argued instead that Britain should continue her world role, not, in the main, to support unique British interests, but as a contribution to world peace. Peace-keeping became the euphemism best calculated to express the new-found ethusiasm for an imperial role. A British presence said Mr. Healey

[1] Vol. 696 H. of C., 17th June, 1964, Col. 1299.

[2] Vol. 687 H. of C., 16th January, 1964, Col. 545,

[3] ibid.

[4] See speeches by Healey, D. Vol. 696 H. of C. 17th June, 1964.

"... can act as a deterrent to local conflicts, and can reduce the risk of war; and if war breaks out, the commitment of British troops can prevent avoidable human suffering and, above all, can help to prevent a small war turning into a large one in which the world powers become directly engaged".[1] This scenario came close to an assertion that Labour would insist upon the maintenance of a great power status for Britain in all circumstances.

On another occasion, Mr. Healey even more enthusiastically exclaimed that "... Britain is great and it will continue to be great and a world power by performing this immensely important service to world peace and to world order by using her capacity and experience in these parts of the world to prevent misery, to prevent avoidable suffering and that is the real role for Britain in the years ahead".[2] The Shadow Minister of Defence with strident tones of a man certain of his mission even conceded that British intervention overseas was likely to increase and that there was "... no real prospect of a diminution in our overseas responsibilities", as far as he could ".. look ahead".[3]

The Conservatives appeared confused but were quick to recognise the change in Labour's policy. Mr. Thorneycroft then Minister of Defence commented that "... it was thought at one time that the policy of the Labour Party was to give up the wider role and try to bring the troops back to Europe. They were always criticizing us for not doing something about that."[4] Nevertheless, to friend and foe alike, it was as yet uncertain whether the ostensible change in Labour's policy was a temporary

[1] Vol. 696 H. of C., 17th June, 1964, Col. 1290.

[2] Vol. 690 H. of C. 26th February, 1964, Col. 470

[3] Vol. 690 H. of C. 26th February, 1964, Col. 470.

[4] Vol. 687 H. of C. 16th January, 1964, Col. 553.

aberration made possible by the determination of the Party's new leader to keep Britain in the top-power League, or the beginning of a more profound and lasting commitment to the East of Suez role. It is impossible to see in Labour's thinking the influence of a coherent doctrine.

It was not too difficult or complex for Mr. Wilson to successfully press his view upon his Party. Labour had no real defence policy to speak of and after 1961 the tension in Europe, caused by the Russian diplomatic offensive, eased, until the dramatic events in the Carribean in the following Autumn, and while the habit of questioning the East of Suez role remained after that date, it lacked the appalling sense of urgency of the late 1950s and of 1961 in particular. Moreover, the Labour leadership now thought that the capability required for its European defence policy could be sustained not by diminishing or abolishing the East of Suez presence, but rather by 'phasing out' the nuclear deterrent. The pressure on the nation's defence policy would thus prove transitory: the moral discredit of possessing a nuclear deterrent could be removed and thereby a massive shift of resources to non-nuclear role made possible.

It also happened, by a quirk of fate, that Britain's diplomatic advances towards Europe had been rebuffed, just one month before Mr. Wilson became Labour's leader. This rejection encouraged a re-kindled distaste for an out and out continental strategy and a resurgent enthusiasm for the Commonwealth and the maritime role.

In fact, the Labour leadership, despite American pressure strongly exerted by the Kennedy administration, had never become entirely

convinced about the merits of membership of the E.E.C. This was certainly the view of Denis Healey. He wrote:"It is a question of ensuring that the strain on Britain's relations with Continental Europe, while her present exclusion from the Common Market is held to threaten, is not reproduced on a far larger scale by strains between the North American continent and a European community which includes Britain".[1] The Labour leadership shared this view. It still tended to see the E.E.C. as a parochial essentially capitalist and perhaps nationalist 'white man's club' made up of a constellation of parties of the right, hell-bent on dismantling welfare and social security provision for the masses. Moreover, while the American pressure had only a limited impact on the Conservative Party which had decided in favour of a European strategy, it had even less on Labour, despite the leadership's respect for Kennedy, which was traditionally less influenced by American strategic views and in any case, as an opposition party, did not feel the full weight of that pressure. But even then Labour was more atlanticist than Europeanist in orientation when it came to political issues.

It was almost inevitable that Conservative disillusionment with the Commonwealth would be greater than that of the Labour Party. It was the Conservatives, by virtue of being in power, that had to deal with the vagaries of Commonwealth politics; while Labour on the other hand from the more remote position of the Opposition benches could reasonably believe that when it gained power Commonwealth affairs would once again flourish, and that Britain, as a result, could be restored to a position of pre-eminence in international politics.

[1] Healey, D., International Affairs, Vol. 38, The Crisis in Europe, April 1962, p.154.

The Conservative Government, in fact, by 1964, had little real confidence in the Commonwealth or in Commonwealth Governments. It was critical of their political and administrative efficiency, the overall lack of stability and the growing extremism of their indigenous ideologies. Above all, though, the Conservatives were now conscious of the Commonwealth's failing as a source of political strength to traditional British diplomacy. There had existed little Commonwealth solidarity in the U.N. for most of the time and Britain had sometimes been forced to line up with Portugal and South Africa in the face of bitter Commonwealth denunciation.

The Conservatives, unlike Labour, never saw the Commonwealth an alternative to Europe. The Commonwealth was a hetrogeneous loosely defined body lacking the homogeneity of the European Community. For the Tories there were no ideological barriers obstructing closer ties with the continent: the pragmatic approach of Conservatives made for greater flexibility in defining the 'national interest'. On the other hand, while Labour's attitude towards Europe softened after 1960, the core of the Party's ideology still supported the Commonwealth connection. Labour, moreover, being more of an ideological party, but not however committed to an absolute ideology, finds it more difficult to embrace a new policy unless some ideological justification can be expounded. In 1961-64 no such ideological justification existed for a Eurocentric policy and one has not been discovered since which unites the Labour movement in relation to long-term goals.

Not only then was Labour pro-Commonwealth, but more important it remained anti-European. This feeling was of course reinforced by the French veto and more especially by the manner in which President de Gaulle

exercised it. The Party's attitude towards the Common Market was volatile, like the state of public opinion which depended very largely on the chances of a successful application. The veto reinforced and deepened former suspicions and encouraged the long held belief that there was now little hope that Britain could secure an entry on reasonable or any other terms to the Community. In consequence, the Labour leadership resolved that it seemed largely irrelevant for British foreign policy makers to concentrate on European affairs, and they should seek a new and dynamic perspective.

Labour, in fact, underpinned the East of Suez role less because of a strong ideological attachment to the Commonwealth than because of a negative disregard for the alternative of closer ties with Europe. However, Labour's ties with the Commonwealth were real and significant. In contrast to the Conservatives, the majority in the Labour Party saw the Commonwealth not as an instrument of international power politics for it lacked the essentials of a power-bloc, but, in itself, something of real merit. They had always seen Attlee's historic decision to quit India as more of a Party design than a national one.

Labour also genuinely felt constrained to promote overseas aid in the hope that just as it had markedly expanded Commonwealth trade after the war, it could do so once more some twenty years later. No one in the Labour Party held this conviction more strongly than Harold Wilson. He retained the view, held so vehemently in his stay at the Board of Trade in the post war Labour Government, that the Commonwealth was "the cornerstone of economic recovery".[1]

[1] Cited Foot, P. The Politics of Harold Wilson 1968, p. 238 - referring to a speech made by Harold Wilson to the House of Commons in 1950.

Another assumption made by Labour leaders, especially by those associated with the Attlee Government, like James Griffiths for example, was that it understood the Afro-Asian mind better than the Conservatives and, by virtue of its own history, had more sympathy for the problem of the under-privileged. The poor throughout the world were members of the Labour Party's universal constituency and in consequence, it was said that Afro-Asian suspicion of a Labour Government would be substantially less than that of a Conservative one. A scintilla of truth can be found in this proposition until Mr. Wilson actually became prime minister.

Of even greater importance was Labour's comforting belief that the Commonwealth or their Western educated elites reflected marked socialist principles in their bid to construct new post-colonial independent societies. It was a multi-racial club, it was the seed bed of self government, and it was "... the only great political confederation which links the people of the advanced countries to those of the developing ones."[1] Labour had given independence to India, Pakistan and Ceylon, and had brought together into the new association, nations with different languages, races, relgions, cultures and ideals. It was thus Labour's political elite who took credit for the "... only instance of the transformation of an Empire built up by a powerful state in which that state has, through deliberate policy, divested itself of its power and transferred sovereignty to units of that Empire which were formerly subordinate".[2] It was Labour that was setting the record straight, righting the wrongs of history, undoing

[1] Labour Party Research Department, Twelve Wasted Years, 1963, p.341.

[2] Labour Party Research Department, Twelve Wasted Years, 1963, p.403-4.

the evils of the past, while it was the Conservatives, so the argument ran, who had irresponsibly through cynicism and ill-will undermined the goodwill fostered by the Attlee government between 1945-51. Labour characterized the 'twelve wasted years' following Attlee's administration as a series of disasters variously described as the "Cyprus tragedy", "the Suez debacle", the Commonwealth "sell out" at the 1961 Common Market negotiations and for general mismanagement of African affairs. Labour, however, remained convinced that it understood the problems of the newly emergent Commonwealth.

A substantial degree of inchoate Commonwealth idealism, then, still existed within the Labour Party. Nevertheless, those Europeanists bent upon a change in policy and striving for an equally idealistic commitment to the Treaty of Rome, and other opponents of the East of Suez role did not cease to exist because of the new-found enthusiasm for the Commonwealth that followed De Gaulle's veto. Instead they entered out of common prudence or cowardice a period of self-inflicted tongue biting made even less enviable by what they thought to be the self-evident nonsense of those seeking a big world role for a truncated Britain. They were to be revived some years later. The secular impact of the external environment would prove too great for ideological arguments however compelling they appeared to be.

In many respects Labour's renewed almost euphoric enthusiasm for the Commonwealth and the East of Suez role after 1963 can be attributed to the Party adopting a policy in deference to its leader's wishes. This proved possible because Labour is a vast coalition of

interests and for the time being it served those interests to defer to their new leader. Certainly Harold Wilson never tired of speaking of the Commonwealth in the most glowing and compelling terms. In one important speech shortly after his election as leader of the Party, he firmly and dramatically insisted that "The future of Britain is in the re-creation of our links with the Commonwealth".[1] The imperial vision had not yet ended.

The notion of Harold Wilson's Commonwealth romanticism appeared to many oddly inconsistent with the rather dour puritan image usually associated with him. Yet Mr. Wilson's commonwealth sympathies resulted from an entirely pragmatic and overwhelming conviction that he held, namely that if Britain were to exert influence in the world, above that of other middle powers, it was because of her unique Commonwealth connection. As Mr. Wilson argued that "in terms of modern economic and military strength, Britain alone can never exert the influence which Britain in the Commonwealth can exert".[2] Moreover, this identification with the Commonwealth centred on his aspiration that he was intellectually equipped to lead and inspire Commonwealth governments to collaborate in solving world problems. Harold Wilson's enthusiasm for the Commonwealth was based on an ideological premiss, on personal ties with Commonwealth countries, on his Board of Trade experience in the post-war Labour Government. Moreover, his feeling for the Commonwealth was more marked even perhaps more passionate than most of his colleagues and his influence was therefore decisive in the formulation of Labour's East of Suez policy after 1963.

[1] Wilson, Harold. 'Labour and the Commonwealth', The Guardian, 23 February 1963.

[2] Labour Party Conference Report, October, 1964, p.116.

Mr. Wilson's personal influence on Labour's foreign policy must not be exaggerated. His pro-Commonwealth speeches would not have been as well received by his closest colleagues had they not touched a sympathetic chord within the main body of the Party both on its industrial and political wings. That they did was largely due to a marked 'little Englander' suspicion of Europe in general, a Germanophobia bordering on the unhinged, a genuine belief that strategically speaking there had been a relative decline in the efficacy of forces deployed in Europe compared with those serving in turbulent areas East of Suez, and a doctrinal attachment to the new Commonwealth which revealed itself in constant nostalgia and primordial flashbacks to its origins.

It was evident that once the European crisis had passed into the limbo of an incipient detente, and the veto had been cast, by the Grand Charles at his famous Paris press conference, Labour returned to a more ideological orientation in its policy-making.

Labour in Opposition: the tension between realpolitik and socialist ideology

The Labour Party, despite its realtively modern birth from the womb of the industrial revolution and mass democracy, and its nineteenth century ideological roots articulated a largely traditional foreign policy in its published or official documents, and showed an early post-war willingness to continue with most, if not all of Britain's traditional or so-called permanent commitments. Labour voters had always put nation before class. The Labour Party did likewise. Indeed, the inherent traditionalism of the nation's foreign policy was reinforced by Labour

which had an ideological sympathy towards Britain's main traditional interest - the Commonwealth. Moreover, the built-in British suspicion of Europe was exacerbated in the Labour Party by ideological considerations about the alleged right wing nature of European politics, and by the insularity of organised Labour and of their leaders in Britain. A salient reason for Labour's orthodoxy, during the greater part of the 1950s and its attachment to traditional policies in general, and of the somewhat byzantine East of Suez role in particular, was that it had neither the propensity nor the intellectual need to question foreign policy assumptions. It was as always pre-occupied with domestic policies, the modernisation of Party thinking, the projection of a favourable image, the struggle for the Party leadership and the stinging electoral defeats of the 1950s. Foreign policy matters could only encroach on this intense domestic introspection if they were seen to be of critical importance to influential and ideologically motivated elements within Labour's vast coalition as was sometimes the case. The great CND debate was really about defence policy but since the unilateralists wanted a Labour government to pursue a neutralist line it had wide foreign policy implications as well. Yet the majority in the Party was unconcerned about the foreign policy consensus, but rather more concerned with questioning the consensus over the commitment to the management of a mixed economy.

Moreover, even within the foreign policy field, Labour was fundamentally concerned with the issues which directly related to the 'national interest', a difficult concept to define. Indeed the 'national interest' could be what the foreign policy makers declare it to be.[1] It is easy enough to agree with Professor Frankel that the "'national interest' is a singularly vague

[1] Seabury, P. Power, Freedom and Diplomacy: the Foreign Policy of the United States of America, 1963, p.86.

concept. It assumes a variety of meanings in the various contexts in which it is used and, despite its fundamental importance, these meanings often cannot be reconciled; hence no agreement can be reached about its ultimate meaning."[1] Labour could well argue with Frankel's description of the 'national interest'. But the top Labour leadership believed that it was possible to discover what was in the national interest by achieving a consensus about it. The issues of international disarmament, German rearmament and re-unification, the cold war, european disengagement, great power summitry, arab-Israelli conflict, Suez, Berlin, Cuba, Indo-China, the united nations, nuclear strategy, N.A.T.O. and the European Community were the chief preoccupations of Labour in its search for inner party consensus. Most of these issues caused much bitterness and great controversy while the East of Suez role appeared relatively undemanding and as such remained largely uncontentious and therefore unexamined. There was never, certainly before 1958, rarely sustained long-term attention given by the Labour movement to the East of Suez role to put its continuance or its character in real doubt. The only time its strategic political value was cast in doubt independently of the European situation was when a cold war crisis blew up within the area itself, and at those times the British presence was unquestioningly taken by the Labour leadership to be self-evidently justified. Even the Keep Left group perceived the Commonwealth as a possible basis for a 'third force' led by Britain. They urged the leadership to accept "Socialist planning on foreign affairs" and collaboration with all nations (including the U.S.S.R.) in "order to secure a socialist policy."[2]

[1] Frankel, J. National Interest, 1970, p.15.

[2] Keep Left statement, September 1947 quoted in Wilmot, Edward. The Labour Party a short History, 1968, p.81.

The world role also maintained both Labour and Conservative support because neither party appreciated the fundamental changes that were occurring in the external environment, or worse, just how severe the strain on Britain's defence forces and national economy was likely to become. The Labour Party, to a lesser degree than the Conservative Party, though still to a significant extent established the parameters of its foreign policy on the basis of power-politics and the pursuit of national goals; on a determined pursuit of national security; and on an ongoing search for economic well-being, and finally, on a robust defence of national values of liberal democracy. These factors were real and their pursuit a legitimate concern of national government acting on behalf of the nation-state, but to the extent to which they were allowed to influence foreign policy thinking during a period of revolutionary change they inhibited perception of realities. It was thus traditionalism in Labour's thinking, as reflected in its declaratory foreign policy statements, in respect of its acceptance of and definition of subjective national interests and to its narrow assessment of national power, which allowed the East of Suez role to go largey unquestioned and unexamined (with the notable exception of Mayhew, Paget and Healey) prior to 1958, and even beyond. Scarcely any real in-depth review of defence policy was attempted before 1966 and that was part of action taken at the governmental and not party level.

Yet whatever the view of the residual 'utopian' and 'scientific socialist' left within the Party about the nature of foreign policy there is no real evidence to suppose that the Labour leadership - largely

composed of Social-democrats of left, right and centre had failed to come to terms with power politics (See Chapter I). Indeed, Francis Williams' complaint that democratic socialism"had not even yet come fully to terms with the generic element of power in foreign affairs" has no evidential support in the post-war period.[1] Labour clearly believed in national power and in its relevance to international politics.

There existed moreover sentiments of obligation and considerations of national security of an overriding nature which also helped to convince Labour of the wisdom of an East of Suez presence. This was perfectly wholesome and understandable, but it imposed a great stress on the disparate elements within the Party. While the Left Wing of the Party wanted to limit the scope of Britain's foreign policy, believing it to be largely misconceived and irrelevant, the great bulk of the Parliamentary Party accepted that Britain's world role was both necessary as a post-imperial responsibility and as an indubitable component of Western security. There was the belief that an international security system might emerge from the welter of Britain's imperial past. Although in favour of Britain divesting itself of some imperial responsibilities after the war, Labour still maintained that deployed military force was necessary mostly in a deterrent role to protect newly formed states. It did not support aggressive military actions overseas, and notably Suez, but even the Suez debacle left the essentials of Britain's foreign policy more or less intact - this continuity in policy was accepted by Labour with more than equanimity. This benign acceptance of the continuity of foreign policy was advocated by Ernest Bevin in 1945 who called for

[1] See Williams, Francis. Ernest Bevin: portrait of a great Englishman, 1952, p.252.

"foreign and defence policy to be put on a different footing outside the party conflict."[1]

And yet the East of Suez role was apparently not as deeply embedded in Labour's external perspective as it had seemed during those first disappointing few years of Labour opposition. By the late 1950s the role was under considerable attack. In fact, the entire traditional commitment to a bi-partisan approach to foreign policy was under attack. Of course, the imperial link was the weakest link and one which aroused the scepticism of the 'utopian' and 'scientific socialist' Left. This was simply because it was never really considered either the most vital part of the 'national interest' or the most central facet of the Party's ideology.[2] It followed, therefore, that if Britain's defence policy were to be revised, the East of Suez role could well expect on both economic or ideological grounds to be curtailed, if not completely dissolved. Of course Labour's defence policy came under attack from the Left. And given the diversity of the Labour Party such attacks proved to be of importance because the Party is essentially a coalition of interests.

By 1958 Britain's defence policy was indeed under strain. The European crisis of that year exposed to the Labour leadership the dangers of over-commitment. The apparent discrepancy between capability and commitment pointed inexorably towards a necessary curtailment of the East of Suez role. Moreover the increasing tension after 1957 between the continental and maritime roles coincided with a far reaching and historic debate within the Labour Party on the merits of a neutralist

[1] Gordon, M. Conflict and Consensus in Labour's Foreign Policy, 1969, p.92.

[2] While no precise definition of the national interest is ever possible, it appears that the Labour leadership could accept the Brookings Foundation's description of the national interest as "the general and continuing ends for which the nation acts, it encompasses the purposive element of foreign policy". See External Relations, Decision making in Britain VII. The Open University, 1972, p.59.

and non-nuclear foreign policy. For a very brief period it appeared likely that there might be a radical change in the content and style of Labour's foreign policy. That a major disavowal of collective security through N.A.T.O. could push the next Labour government into disarmament and neutralism with the prospect that this would weaken the West vis-a-vis the Soviet bloc. The Scarborough Conference of 1960 perhaps revealed the first tentative sign by Labour's leadership that continuity in Foreign policy only made sense if Britain's power position remained constant. Mr. Gaitskell's robust defence of continued commitment to N.A.T.O. carried with it also the recognition that those basic principles which were relevant when Britain was a great power, were likely to be less appropriate to a middle power's foreign policy. Many Labour members of parliament were convinced that Britain was a middle rank power and as such should have regional and not universal interests; that conversely if she were to assume the posture and commitments of a superpower she must have the power of one. Generally speaking individual members of Labour's Shadow Cabinet and the party leadership as a whole perceived that attitudes towards Britain's imperial role were changing even if implicitly and that a value-change was also occurring in relation to the idea that Britain was still a great power. Moreover, it was also perceived, however vaguely, by some Labour leaders - like Kenneth Younger for example - that the belief in the United Kingdom's world role was no longer shared by influential groups within Britain itself.[1] That by the mid-sixties no explicit set of beliefs of doctrine existed which justified a continued presence East of Suez. It is therefore all the more remarkable that Labour between 1960 and 1964 acquired a renewed commitment to stay East of Suez.

[1] See Younger, Kenneth. Britain's Role in a changing World, Fabian Tract No. 327 pp. 5-16.

The European crisis also underlined the interelationship of the East of Suez role with other aspects of British foreign policy. Increasingly, during the 1950s, it became painfully obvious that any change in one part of Britain's foreign or defence policy would inevitably initiate a kind of chain reaction throughout the entire policy. Such was the inter-dependent relationship between a continental and an extra-continental commitment that the abandonment or modification of one was bound to affect the structure and viability of the other. Labour leaders were forced to articulate a distinction between vital and non-vital or peripheral interests which all defence planners have in the end to make. Europe by virtue of its close geographical proximity, and by the very nature of Soviet military capabilities, was considered vital, while East of Suez, being physically and psychologically more remote, was considered less vital. In consequence, the Party's attitude towards the East of Suez role showed a certain volatility which was consistent with the ambiguity the nation had always revealed towards expendable strategic commitments. Singapore had never been as strategically important to Britain as the Channel or the Rhine. Britain as ever was therefore dependent on a European balance of power.

The spatial variable was thus of utmost significance for Labour in its consciousness of foreign policy matters.[1] Manifestly in the case of the East of Suez-European dichotomy, distance was the decisive and expected variable, and it prevailed over historical, cultural and even sentimental attachments. Certainly ideology was no compensation for it.

Even after the relaxation of European tensions in 1962, the

[1] Howard Michael, Britain's Defences, Survival, IIS, Vol. 3, No. 1 - January-February 1961, p.35. Dr. Howard noted "the chronic schizophrenia from which Britain suffers as an off-shore island, at once part of the continent of Europe and detached from it."

scope and content of Labour's foreign policy looked more and more as though it would be circumscribed by a Eurocentric posture. However, the secular trend towards a restriction in the scope and content of Britain's interests did not reach fruition while Labour was in opposition. Even if Hugh Gaitskell had lived it is doubtful whether the change would have taken place for he too appeared rooted to an East of Suez role.[1] The appointment of a new pro-Commonwealth and anti-European leader of the Party in 1963, who believed that the overwhelming danger to international security was local instability East of Suez, coincided with the ostensibly sudden French veto of Britain's Common Market bid.[2] Moreover, the European crisis over Berlin had ended before the liquidation of the Cuban-missile crisis. The crisis of British over-stretch in defence policy was eased, while her foreign policy initiative was stultified. Thus in 1964 there seemed to exist neither the incentive nor the opportunity for Labour drastically to alter Britain's foreign and defence policies. Indeed, Britain was now heavily engaged militarily East of Suez in stark confrontation with Sukarno's Indonesia which was on collision course with the ill-starred Malaysian Federation. A relatively big military build-up proved necessary.

Labour's shifting and sometime bewildering evaluation of the East of Suez and European roles had a multitude of strategic, political and economic dimensions. During the 1950s the strategic dimension was most salient for the cold war was at its height. Moreover, it was only around 1960 that the strategic dimension was given an overwhelming European focus. Before then the East of Suez role - the global focus - had appeared almost

[1] Death of British Democracy, op. cit., p.102.

[2] Harold Wilson was relatively free to shape Labour's East of Suez strategy because no political or party constraints restricted his freedom of action (see next Chapter) His attutudes, values, images were widely shared (or simply not disavowed) by his parliamentary colleagues. For a discussion of this phenomenon see Verba, Sydney, Assumptions of Rationality and Non-Rationality in the Models on the International System, World Politics, XIV, pp. 93-117.

equally important in the fight against communism. Moreover, the Anglo-American alliance extended in those days beyond Europe, Britain and America were global partners.

This strategic dimension though began to diminish in importance at the beginning of the end of the first post-war decade. This was due to several factors. Firstly, Britain was forced to admit in 1957 that she could no longer defend herself against ballistic-missile attack. The Channel had been overcome by technology. Secondly, in the same year, the Soviet Sputnik underlined the fact that United States could no longer, with impunity, from the safety of an almost invulnerable homeland, threaten massive retaliation on the U.S.S.R. Total nuclear stalemate between the superpowers was in prospect. Thirdly, in 1960 the failure of the Blue Streak missile system indicated that Britain could not sustain much longer a totally independent deterrent. Britain's deterrent was to become part of the deterrent forces committed to N.A.T.O. as set out in the Nassau agreement of December 1962.[1] And fourthly, after 1962, the perceived threat from the Soviet Union seemed to be slackening, with the ending of Mr. Kruschev's forward policies. The process of East-west detente was now well advanced.

This diminishing concern with strategic matters militated in favour of Europe and against the imperial deployment of British resources. As detente between East and West emerged, the relative and absolute importance of the East of Suez role sensibly decreased. Indeed, by the early 1960s it was becoming plain that unlike in the thirties, when Britain's defence policy was under pressure in Europe, the World Role appeared

[1] The Permanent Alliance, op. cit. p.

the most expendable part of that policy. And curiously when that policy was not under pressure the role seemed for many in the Party either a needless extravagance, or even worse, shabby neo-colonialism. The European crisis as in all such crises revealed the essential brittleness of British defence policy which had extended British resources beyond that which they could properly sustain. As the cold war slackened in intensity there arose in the sixties an increasing concern and feel for economic matters.

This growing concern with economic matters, and the important shifts in Labour's political attitudes at the turn of the decade, were irreversible and secular trends affecting the whole of British Society. Yet all three variables, strategic, economic and political, tended to point decidedly to a move from East of Suez towards Europe. The only possible impediment could be Labour's ideological attachment to the ideal of the Commonwealth which might one day become a community of democratic socialist states.

The European-East of Suez dichotomy was however developing in opposite ways in Britain and the U.S.A. and this was a factor of considerable importance because of the inter-dependent relationships within the Western alliance. The Americans in the light of the Laotian and Vietnamese crises and the growing Soviet political and strategic interest in the Middle East, were in fact moving from a European to an East of Suez posture while Britain was moving in the opposite direction.

This change in the focus of British interests sprang, before 1962, from considerations of strategic necessity and only after that date from wider foreign policy factors. That the initial move in Labour's thinking away from the East of Suez role can be attributed to defence requirements

is of crucial importance however perverse it appears, for the Party was notoriously unconcerned usually with British defence problems in isolation from wide foreign policy considerations[1]. Moreover, foreign policy issues tend invariably to dominate opposition thinking (especially if that Party is self-consciously ideological), for opposition parties are usually oblivious to or consciously myopic about environmental limitations and tend to believe that sufficient capability can always be developed to pursue goals which are thought 'necessary' to the national interest. That this was not so is almost certainly due to the extent and nature and close proximity of the European crisis. Britain whether socialist or not could not ignore a possible military threat emerging from within Europe. The problem of Britain's military overstretch becoming more and more obvious to all those engaged in establishing domestic priorities within a party largely concerned to meet the needs of a changing society in a bid to transform that society into a democratic-socialist one.

Nevertheless, neither considerations of defence nor foreign policy proved absolutely conclusive, for the period of severe defence strain soon passed even if only temporarily, and Britain's efforts to join the Common Market were for the time being vitiated by the French veto. However, these two alternate periods of domination first by defence and then by foreign policy (defence of course, always being considered as the servant of foreign policy) were indicative of the kind of pressure generated by the East of Suez role.[2] This revealed how existing commitments

[1] However Professor James Barber takes a different view when he contends that "some of the great conference debates and divisons have come on foreign policy issues". I do not disagree but would argue that detailed interest in and grasp of defence issues within the Labour Party is much less marked. See Barber, James. Who Makes British Foreign Policy? 1976, p.81.

[2] It may be objected that in principle the distinction between defence and foreign policy is almost impossible to draw, but in practice, since the advent of nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles, a fundamental distinction has emerged. This results, I think, from the application of deterrent theories to inter-state behaviour which do not seek to remedy or remove grievances between states. Therefore attempts to remedy or remove grievances between states are likely to be a part of foreign policy rather than of defence.

invariably pre-determined the nature of the national priorities that governments and opposition parties felt constrained to establish.

A final and very important but suppressed element in Labour's shifting attitude towards the overseas presence was the role of socialist ideology. That is to say, those values embodied in the concepts of social and racial equality, co-operation between peoples and the presumed fraternity of nation-states. Indeed, the East of Suez debate between the Left and Right reflected the much larger internecine political disagreement about whether basic socialist ideals should or could be pursued in their pure form or whether they should be substantially adapted to domestic and international realities. Could such socialist values or for that matter any values be relevant in a world living in a state of nature?

The debate on international affairs though bitter and often primitive at Party Conference and at N.E.C. meetings was never so traumatic as the domestic struggle within the Party as epitomised in the clause four debate which centred around the leadership struggle between Hugh Gaitskell and Aneurin Bevan.[1] The Labour movement nevertheless witnessed some fairly spectacular blood-letting and such controversies largely derived from the utopian Left's implacable passion for a more articulated and wholesome foreign policy based on such values as unaggressiveness, benevolence and a disinterestedness in power. While Labour's neo-marxist or 'scientific socialist' left appeared equally bent on taking Britain out of N.A.T.O. and into the delights of neutralism or even, as Hugh Gaitskell once alleged, into the Warsaw Pact.[2]

[1] Mr. Bevan described Hugh Gaitskell as "a dessicated calculating machine". Quoted in Wilmot, Edward, op. cit. p.88.

[2] Private remark made to the author's twin brother Alan Lee Williams, M.P. by Hugh Gaitskell in October 1960. Mr. Williams was then National Youth Officer of the Labour Party.

Because the Party failed to arrive at any consensus as to a 'socialist' approach to the East of Suez role or even the basis of its ideological rationale for its foreign policy, agreement on specific issues was only periodic. Even worse, the East of Suez role was more ideologically ambiguous and potentially loaded with 'moral issues' than most other aspects of Labour's foreign policy since it cut across so many Party values.

Moreover, the Party as a whole was not untouched by the contagion of pragmatism which had for so long dominated British political culture. Of course pragmatism is a method of deciding issues, which is not value-free. It constitutes 'trial and error' which is the basis of liberal-democratic ideology. As a result there was no real perceived need to fit the East of Suez role into a new formulated and purposive foreign policy or to discard it because it was not in accord with the pure milk of socialist ideology. Labour's thinking as expressed in official policies suffered from the belief that its foreign policy should not be wholly directed towards the 'national interest', but neither was the Party agreed on what socialist values should or could influence policy. Clearly a variety of factors impinge,including constraints, perceptions as well as the so-called 'national interest'.[1] The resulting synthesis of socialist values and 'national interests' not surprisingly led to ambivalent attitudes towards foreign policy. Many within the extra-parliamentary Party denied the existence of the 'national interest' altogether.[2] No distinctively socialist foreign policy ever emerged from the Labour Party. Only a chimerical hope remained that a

[1] See Northedge, F. S. in External Relations, Decision Making in Britain VII (Parts 1-7), 1972, Open University Press, pp. 95-113.

[2] Raymond Aron would also agree that no rational national interest can be discovered. See International Journal XXI, 1967, p. 194.

a 'socialist foreign policy' was ever likely to be practicable.

While a 'pragmatic' approach to foreign policy avoids the rigidity associated with an overtly ideological foreign policy, and indeed avoids the absurdity of supposing that ideology alone can be the main spring of foreign policy, it also tends to preclude the grand unswerving pursuit of a high purpose. It can lead to inconsistencies and contradictions as its fragmentary nature encourages the review of partial re-ordering of some aspects of the policy in isolation from the whole. The policies are acquired incrementally and are not referred to a central purpose. For no guiding purpose can emerge from such an unreflective process and the policy when it emerges is no more than the sum total of a series of compromises between entrenched interests.

Thus, a pragmatic foreign policy in the sense of a policy being determined by trial and error can become a policy without a core: a policy with a large perimeter but no centre - a traditional reflex devoid of a genuine rationale.[1] Although all foreign policy must be derived in a general sense from political ideology Labour lacked an explicit set of beliefs which could explain reality and thereby prescribe goals for political action. In the final analysis Labour accepted and practised the Liberal approach to politics which assumes politics to be a matter of trial and error. Labour adopted the empirical approach to politics and categorically rejected the myth of a 'socialist' solution to the vicissitudes of international politics. Foreign policy under Labour was derived from a pragmatic frame of mind (trial and error) which established foreign policy goals in very broad terms. A definite lack of coherence or focus disfigured foreign policy because policy goals and actions were a

[1] See Holsti, K. J. International Politics, 1967, p.132.

response to domestic and external conditions which different governments perceived differently. Only in the 1960s was there an attempt to provide in Britain's foreign policy a European core to either support or displace perceived peripheral interests. Thus, because the East of Suez role was not part of a coherent foreign policy, though one not devoid of liberal-democratic ideology in regard to the articulation of the image of political stability, it was peripheral in terms of what the political elites agreed to be 'national interest', it was unstable. This policy was threatened after 1958 by capability diminution and by fluctuations in more vital areas of Britain's foreign policy arising from changes in the external environment.

It is not quite true and never can be so that the official Party line was totally devoid of ideological objectives - this it certainly was not, but it was free of a commitment to an absolute ideology like that associated with avowedly marxist-socialist regimes. But Labour had a 'grand design' even a sense of mission that Britain by its example could save mankind. This belief led Aneurin Bevan once to remark that 'There is only one hope for mankind, and that hope still remains in this little island'.[1] This sentiment lay at the centre of much of the Left Wing's critique of official Labour Party policy, that Britain possessed through the Labour movement an incomparable asset for the promotion of world peace and that the whole of Africa and Asia was awaiting its lead.[2] This called for bold domestic policies and dramatic foreign policy gestures. This approach was rightly castigated by the right as utopianism of the worst sort. Indeed, the Rightist contention was that Labour

[1] Quoted in Bell, Coral. The Debatable Alliance, 1964, p.2.

[2] This sentiment lay at the heart of Mr. Kingsley Martin's editorial bias as revealed in The New Statesman and Nation (as it then was) in the early and mid-fifties.

would have to accept an overt compromise on her foreign policy principles since it could never control the external environment to the same extent as the domestic scene.

The Left Wing, however, retained its ideological resilience and commitment. It continued to see the East of Suez policy as a means of changing the international environment, the beginnings perhaps of a third-world neutralist bloc, led by Britain seeking a solution to war. The ultimate goal for the 'utopian' and 'scientific socialist' Left was a socialist world order. In the final analysis a socialist commonwealth or world order could not be reconciled with 'capitalism and imperialism.' However, perhaps because of this unwillingness to compromise, the Left Wing's aspirations became remote from actual Labour policy and its influence only marginal. Moreover, the Left was never a monolithic bloc and attitudes to the imperial role varied a great deal. The Left Wing aspirations represented the more radical and militant attitude of Party activists who believed in the class-war and readily accepted that a choice had to be made between supporting 'progressive' or 'reactionary' regimes. The Party's immediate objectives as defined by the parliamentary leadership were notable for their lack of ideological pretentiousness. However, within the Labour Party as a whole there persisted a strong emphasis on ideology which always revealed itself at the annual conferences often to the chagrin of the Parliamentary leadership.

Without any doubt the period 1951-64 reveals that the subsequent decision to withdraw from East of Suez was not simply the result of Britain's economic crisis but had its birth pangs long before January 1968.[1] Indeed, during this formative period the World Role was

[1] Indeed the economic consequences of Britain's world role were deliberately exaggerated according to Professor Wilson. See Wilson, Thomas, What Can we Afford? Britain's Sham Poverty. The Statist, London, February 4, 1966.

noticeably undermined by a number of variables which received a response from Britain's foreign policy makers - the European-East of Suez dichotomy, the growing discrepancy between capability and commitment, the problems of alliance politics, the balance of payments situation, the concern over whether Britain should be a regional or a world power, the question of economic growth and of technological innovation, and the doubts about whether political, economic or strategic considerations should or even could dominate foreign policy making.

Dilemmas of this nature were not easily solved by the Labour Party in opposition because its attitudes and values were varied and conflicting. Moreover as Professor Barber contends, foreign and defence issues within the Labour Party have proved critical to intra-party conflicts because they also related to domestic issues.[1] Traditionalism, a great concern with domestic affairs, a commitment to Liberal-democracy and parliamentarianism, basic socialist values, antithetical assessments of the cold war, trade union concern about trade, inflation, incomes and unemployment and many other attitudes, all interacted to give Labour's foreign and defence policies before the constraints imposed by the responsibilities of office a distinctive lack of precision and somewhat rhetorical character. These attitudes were all taken forward from the Opposition benches into Government. We can now examine the position once Labour was in office and see how the Wilson Labour government grappled with the realities of power and with particular reference to the decision in 1968 to withdraw from East of Suez by 1971.

[1] Barber, op. cit. p.81.

C H A P T E R V

LABOUR'S GRAND DEFENCE STRATEGY ON THE EVE OF POWER

Mr. Wilson's first Labour Government took office on a wave of hope and calculated optimism. Hope was based on the expectation that stop-go economic policies would end; calculated optimism, on the feeling that with a modicum of planning the problems of society would be responsive to orderly and civilised change. A rational defence policy not only appeared likely. It seemed almost certain under the brilliant and well-informed Mr. Healey. The new Defence Secretary was the master of his subject and no subject was fraught with greater moral, intellectual and technical complexity than that of defence in the nuclear age. He was the first 'defence intellectual' to become defence minister since the war.[1]

Already the formidable catalogue of mistakes during the Conservative period of rule made depressing reading. According to the Labour Party, the Conservative record had been one of waste and miscalculation on a truly monumental scale. Conservative Governments "had failed to come up with a real defence policy, failed to fulfil pledges to NATO, failed in their proclaimed intention to maintain the British nuclear deterrent, failed to provide balanced forces to honour Commonwealth and other treaty commitments, failed to overcome anachronistic inter-service rivalries and failed to spur progress to international disarmament - the only sure defence in these times."[2] The Labour Party complained also about the cost of defence which, running at around £1,500m or more a year, meant expenditure "on schemes predictably fitted only for the scrap heap". Criticism of the number of Ministers of Defence since 1951 (nine in all) played a large part in the Labour Party's case against the

[1] The Policies of Power, op. cit., pp. 130-143.

[2] Twelve Wasted Years, op. cit., p.389.

Conservative record because it has resulted in the annual Defence White Paper becoming "landmarks of folly, full of pretentious claims and over-statements, but each contradicting its predecessors and lacking in any consistent, rational policy."[1] All this was to end. Mr. Healey had a policy. In "Policy for Peace" three crucial paragraphs stood out: 7. We seek the banning of all nuclear weapons everywhere. But the west cannot renounce nuclear weapons so long as the Communist bloc possesses them. 8. Britain, however, should cease the attempt to remain an independent nuclear power, since this neither strengthens the alliance nor is it now a sensible use of our limited resources. 9. The west must never be the first to use the H-Bomb. The NATO armies, however, are at present perilously dependent on nuclear weapons. The aim should be that they need never be the first to use nuclear weapons of any kind. For this would be to turn a conventional conflict into a nulcear war. With this end in view Britain should press urgently for the following objectives: To make it possible for NATO to halt a local conflict with conventional weapons alone. To stop the spread of nuclear weapons to individual countries inside the alliance. To establish satisfactory collective political control of Western nuclear weapons and military strategy."[2]

This was a coherent policy and in relation to (1) NATO, (2) overseas bases, (3) the Royal Navy, (4) the RAF and (5) defence organisation was a traditional and pre-eminently Atlanticist policy.

1. NATO: The Labour Party endorsed the strictures of General Lauris Norstad, NATO's Supreme Commander in Europe until January, 1962, who repeatedly criticised the manpower weakness of the BAOR and other

[1] ibid., p.389.

[2] ibid., p.396.

European contingents in Europe.[1] This Atlanticist criticism related to the appalling choice confronting NATO if it remained too weak to face a Russian conventional challenge except by nuclear weapons. John Strachey, one of the Labour Party's leading intellectuals, pointed out that this meant literally the choice between surrender or all-out nuclear war.[2] Labour defence specialists noted the views of President Kennedy, and his decision to expand US conventional resources in order to achieve a system of flexible response free of dependence upon massive retaliation or abject surrender. Mr. Patrick Gordon Walker, the party's spokesman on defence, said in 1962 that British resources should be spent not on a nuclear contribution to the defence of Western Europe but "on really good mobile and well-equipped conventional forces".[3] This, he further argued, would give Britain greater influence within the NATO alliance and this mattered more to her than remaining an independent nuclear power. The BAOR could thereby make up for its severe deficiencies as regards means of transport, modern conventional weapons and equipment of almost every kind. Mr. Healey had often complained about the deployment of the BAOR which seemed ill-prepared for combat with some of its units located over 100 miles from their planned battle positions. The remedy lay in financing new accommodation in appropriate areas and in an effort to deploy well-balanced conventional forces in those new areas.[4]

2. Overseas Bases: Labour took the view that although the 1961 Defence White Paper contained an attractive world map, revealing British armed forces deployed on a world scale from Hong Kong to the West Indies,

[1] ibid. p. 397.

[2] On the Prevention of War, op. cit., p.113. Mr. Strachey admitted with commendable modesty that "It is much easier to criticize the present policy and military doctrines of NATO than to suggest a viable alternative".

[3] Twleve Wasted Years, op. cit. p.392.

[4] ibid., p.398. Labour even complained that "in 1957 and 1958, the Tories steam-rollered the allies into accepting the withdrawal of 22,000 men. Thus today (1964) BAOR, reformed into seven Brigade groups, has an established strength of only 55,000 men."

this grand commitment - "in penny packets" - made little sense militarily or politically. The real need was for the "curtailment of standing overseas garrisons, with coverage of our commitments by strong, highly mobile strike forces poised, with the best conventional equipment, for instant deployment, in any trouble spots where they may be required". This suggestion appealed very much to Harold Wilson who believed in a maritime strategy.

3. Royal Navy: In regard to the navy, the policy was most explicit - a maritime strategy. Labour extolled the virtues of sea-power. A sufficiently strong amphibious force required the capacity to mount more than one operation at a time and they were dependent upon the big commando ships. In 1963 only two were in service: the Bulwark and the Albion. But the Labour Party seemed ready to pledge an increase in amphibious capability. The 1962 White Paper set out a typical "amphibious task force" designed for overseas emergencies.[1] Labour admitted the value of such forces and went on to indicate a readiness to increase the number of ships afloat. For it was conceded that Bulwark and her escorts had operated efficiently in the Kuwait landings of 1961. The essential criticism, though, on which the Conservative Party remained silent, was that Britain would then have been incapable of handling a second emergency at the same time.

The Labour Party criticised the Nassau Agreement (under which Polaris was acquired for the Royal Navy). It declared itself against the agreement because "Admiralty planners, anxious to build up the badly needed ambibious conventional forces, will be forced to divert

[1] ibid., p.399. Labour was anxious to press for bigger amphibious strike-forces over overseas emergencies.

funds to the pointless venture of a mythical seaborne deterrent",[1] which was a rather curious way of describing what others would describe as the most perfect invulnerable deterrent system yet devised.[2]

4. Royal Air Force: Over the RAF the Labour Party's attitude was markedly equivocal. It was perceived by the party that the day of the manned bomber was short-lived. In future, party spokesmen reiterated, the use of strategic nuclear bombers would be doubtful; rockets were, in any case, taking over increasingly the anti-aircraft role of fighters and also the tactical bombing role on, or near, the battlefield. It was confidently asserted, with particular irony, that air support for commando task forces was likely to come increasingly from the Fleet Air Arm. The vital function of RAF Transport Command (as it was then) had been critically affected "by bungling and the starving of requisite financy by the Tory Government."[3] This lack of foresight had resulted in Transport Command seeming nearly obsolete and in no position, without assistance from requisitioned civilian aircraft, to airlift quickly service personnel and equipment to trouble spots as the occasion arose. Endless delays over procurement - over the provision, for example, of the long-range Belfast heavy freighter - had severely handicapped Britain's global role.

5. Defence Organisation: Drastic rationalisation was required in the Ministerial structure and service commands. The plans presented in the 1963 White Paper were regarded as disappointing because the further plan to centralise authority at the Ministry of Defence was likely to accentuate

[1] ibid., p.399.

[2] On Prevention of War, op. cit. p.62, John Strachey regarded the seaborne deterrent rather more sympathetically.

[3] Twelve Wasted Years, op. cit., p.400. Labour cautiously conceded that "the one vital function still fulfilled by the Air Force is that of RAF transport command".

opportunities for the staking of individual service claims. And it was the singular failure of the Conservative Government to quell "the inter-service rivalries and empire-building which had led to duplication of effort, both in employment of manpower and commissioning of expensive weapons and equipment."[4] The Labour Party approvingly endorsed the view that "until a single ministry is given full responsibility for operations, plans and intelligence throughout the defence forces, until there is a central defence budget instead of separate estimates for each service, and until the Admiralty, the War Office and the Air Ministry are reduced to the size and scope of administrative headquarters, defence policy in Britain will continue to be bedevilled by inter-service politics and prejudice".[1]

Such was the Labour Party's policy at the outset of the first Wilson Government and it can be said to express a workable policy based upon compromise. Its general formulation was acceptable to the US Administration and was in accordance with an Atlanticist view of Western security. Moreover, the policy, taken as a whole, was a reasoned attempt to enhance both Britain's capability and influence in the world. It suffered from over-generalisation and from an equivocal attitude to nuclear weapons which Hugh Gaitskell, the party's leader, sought to combat at the Scarborough conference of 1960.[2]

There were three major assumptions underpinning Labour's defence policy. Firstly, that whatever the circumstances defence savings must be achieved; secondly, that a sustained and sophisticated European role should be given high priority; and thirdly, that an improved capability

1 The Times, 9th January 1963, Basis for a Logical Policy.

2 During the 1960 Annual Conference of the Labour Party held at Scarborough between 3rd and 7th October, Mr. Hugh Gaitskell passionately defended the traditional defence and foreign policies of the Labour movement.

for the imperial role should be achieved through better planning and resource allocation. It was an ambitious policy and lacked a central doctrine, but contained a number of possibilities which pointed towards a re-emphasised role East of Suez. Labour's marked inclinations towards an East of Suez role however seemed to be indicated by the intensity of interest not expressed with regard to Europe or towards the fate of both NATO and the EEC.

The real question was whether these three policy declarations contained in Labour's defence policy were compatible or whether Labour's commitment to make defence savings diminished any hope of improving Britain's grand stategic objectives. Clearly, Labour's resolve to play a significant role on the continent ran counter to a desire to expand Britain's role East of Suez.

As we have seen, by the time of the General Election Campaign in 1964, the general drift of Labour's external policy was clearly established. This policy was essentially traditional and even conservative in character.

There were many factors which explain this conservatism in Labour's foreign policy - Harold Wilson's own preferences, a resolve that Labour should line-up as a responsible alternative government, the structure of the Party with its parliamentary-centred decision-making orientation, and a domestic pre-occupation.[1] The relevance of this re-endorsement of traditional interests soon became evident. It helps explain Labour's definition of the East of Suez role and makes explicable the somewhat expansive character of Labour's foreign policy.

The conservatism in Labour's foreign policy was reinforced noticeably by Mr. Wilson's predilection for the pursuit of means rather than ends.[2]

[1] See interesting inside account of the differing pressures on Harold Wilson both as leader and Prime Minister in Williams, Marcia, Inside Number 10, 1972.

[2] Perhaps Mr. Wilson preferred a de-ideologized or non-socialist foreign policy rather than a non-ideological foreign policy which is strictly speaking impossible.

Policy was to be constructed on a workable compromise rather than on the basis of principle. Harold Wilson's leadership style - his dislike of confrontation - made for ambiguity in policy and consequently to a somewhat contrived peace between the left and right wings of his Party. The Left within the party was quiescent because of an electoral need inseparable from the need to gain power, but Mr. Wilson's ability to balance or indeed to neutralise the two Wings was also an essential and central feature of the acceptance of a non-ideological foreign policy.[1]

The traditionalism inherent in Labour's foreign policy cannot, though, be simply ascribed to the political primacy of Mr. Wilson. In fact, Labour's traditionalism had been asserted throughout its history, and particularly in the late 1940s by Ernest Bevin, Labour's most esteemed foreign secretary, and reiterated by Hugh Gaitskell in 1960.

There were also certain so-called permanent interests which made for traditionalism. The structure of the Party institutionalised a certain rigidity because it tends to reflect a slow decision-making process which is influenced by a complex voting procedure in many different organs of the Party.[2] In addition, there was a tendency toward domestic introspection which was a separate tradition on the left reflecting a more general feeling of apathy if not rejection of foreign affairs. As a result there was no dynamic element within the Party seeking change, and hence no far reaching re-definition of 'national interests'. The main feature of Labour's foreign policy was, then its inherent traditionalism. This led to a broad foreign policy consensus and to the articulation of traditional commitments. The assertion of ideological claims simply receded.

[1] By non-ideological in this context is meant a non-socialist foreign policy.

[2] See excellent analysis of the distribution of political power within the Labour Party in McKenzie, R. British Political Parties, 1964. pp. 485-578.

Yet this tendency toward a broad foreign policy was counteracted somewhat by the traditional insularity of the Labour Party. Mr. Wilson revealed a parochialism shared by many of his colleagues. Despite rather vague allusions to the manifest need to sustain a 'Socialist Commonwealth' Mr. Wilson's speeches reflected a decidedly narrow perspective. He admitted that his "vision" had "... a certain nationalist streak in it..." and that one "... might call me a little Englander in consequence"[1]. This he indeed remained.

It would be wrong to suppose that Harold Wilson was indifferent to foreign affairs: indeed some of the problems about which he felt most passionately - the Commonwealth, the Common Market and the German problem, particularly in the mid-fifties - were foreign policy issues of resounding importance. It was clear that if ever he became Prime Minister he would attach importance to both his own and Britain's diplomatic esteem in international politics.

In line with Harold MacMillan's style of personal diplomacy in his visit to Moscow in 1964, Mr. Wilson emphasised to Mr. Khruschev the value of annual summit meetings which he saw of importance in helping to maintain international stability.

Mr. Wilson's distrust of continental politics led to a strong personal ideological commitment to the Anglo-American alliance. Well before the October 1964 election, though, it was clear beyond reasonable doubt that Mr. Wilson took the view that the Anglo-American connection was paramount in his assessment of the 'national interest'.

Mr. Wilson's gritty determination to uphold the alliance with the U.S. revealed his attachment to another of Britain's traditional links,

[1] Wilson, H. Listener, Vol. 72, 29th October, 1964, p.656.

the Commonwealth.[1] This attitude reflected has marked anti-European, and particularly anti-German stance which the Atlanticist concept in his foreign policy orientation basically reflected. Britain must therefore continue her role East of Suez, with the U.S. as her foremost ally, and with full participation in N.A.T.O., but refusing to get involved in any attempt to integrate the economies of Western Europe through the European community. It was clear that under Wilson's leadership Labour would retain the inherited weight of Britain's traditional interests.

It became apparent that if defence savings were achieved they must be realised through a more efficient defence structure and not through a diminution of the nation's commitments. This hope rested on a more cost-conscious approach to the management of defence expenditure which was seen as the real answer to the problem of meeting existing commitments without a massive reduction in capabilities.[2]

Labour's attitude therefore towards the East of Suez role must be seen in the context of a wider defence spectrum, since the inter-relationship between different facets of defence policy is a complex one. Labour's European, overseas and nuclear policies were, for example, so inter-related, and were all dependent on limited resources, that a change in the priorities attached to one was certain to result in a change in attitude towards the other. The East of Suez policy did not, and could not, operate in isolation.[3]

When the painful decision to withdraw was reluctantly made in 1968 it did not reflect a radical re-adjustment in thinking about

[1] See Paul Foot's savage biography, The Politics of Harold Wilson for an assessment of his Commonwealth commitment.

[2] The Policies of Power, op. cit. pp.167-191.

[3] See Zinkin, Maurice. The Commonwealth and Britain East of Suez, International Affairs, Vol. 42 No. 2, April 1966 pp.207-229. Mr. Zinkin asserted that "It is still the need to protect Commonwealth interests which makes it so difficult for Britain simply to sign the Treaty of Rome."

the value of the East of Suez policy: nor was it the result of any ideological objections to the World Role. It was that once again external factors compelled an appraisal of the role East of Suez. The question became clear: how strongly did Labour want to stay East of Suez, and to what extent were other priorities worthy of sacrifice so that the imperial posture could be sustained?

Of course Labour could not notionally accept that in opposition it had to choose between priorities, but it was clear that the ambitious nature of Labour's defence posture eventually made a choice inevitable when Labour was in power. The three basic elements of defence savings, an effective perhaps even bigger East of Suez presence, and a greater European capability, induced the very bleak conditions that drove the formidable wedge between Britain's maritime and continental strategies. It is arguable that this contradiction has lain at the heart of British foreign policy for some years. It can be argued that in many respects foreign and defence policy have never in fact been very closely related since 1945.[1] This was the central contradiction in Labour's defence policy in opposition, and it was to become very apparent after they won the October election. In fact, despite Labour's premises to cut back defence expenditure, it became clear beyond peradventure that Labour was committeed to a defence posture that was the most ambitious it had ever advanced. Perhaps no political party this century had urged upon the British people such an ambitious programme for national prestige and recovery.

Labour's defence plans were certain, if pursued, to erode the central assumption that defence savings could be achieved. It was

[1] See Darby, Philip, British Defence Policy East of Suez, 1947-68, 1973, pp. 16-21 and pp. 135-42.

almost certain if not entirely predictable that Labour would have to abandon its declaratory defence policy. However, what was not so clear or predictable was the direction and extent of the modification likely to occur. That modification would seriously undermine the nature of Labour's foreign policy, and in particular, that it would compel a complete pull-out from the East of Suez role, seemed remote in 1964. Labour's defence policy faced inevitable readjustment in the light of the realities of the external environment and in the light of economic limitations.

Labour's commitments to the East of Suez presence was dramatically underlined by a commitment to a maritime strategy. Labour's attachments to the World Role was emphasised by an overt reliance on naval power to fulfil that role. It also revealed how the naval contribution was to be financed given its somewhat expansive nature. "I believe" said Mr. Wilson, "that in the remaining years of this century our historic role as a naval power is going to find a new fulfilment both in helping newly established nations and in moving rapidly and effectively in fulfilling an international police role. This means naval forces, and these cannot be afforded if we are spending our substance on the pursuit of illusory nuclear status".[1]

A revitalised period for the Navy was in prospect. Mr. Wilson made this clear during the election campaign in Britain. "The Navy has been run down to a dangerously low level", he said, "and is now pathetically inadequate in numbers of ships in commission, in manning and in most modern types, such as nuclear powered hunter-tracker submarines."[2] And then, in a bid to underscore a positive commitment, Mr. Wilson argued

[1] From a speech at Bridgeport University, Connecticut, USA, 3rd March 1964.

[2] Cited by Vickers, Dame Joan, Vol. 704, H. of C. 14th December, 1964. Col. 127, referring to Mr. Wilson's election speech in her Devonport constituency.

that "We believe that in the present condition of the world, we need a stronger and more effective Navy. Later, he expostulated on the qeustion of how Labour was to finance this re-vamped role. "We shall need an expanded naval ship-building programme. How are we going to pay for it? Out of the savings made through stopping the wasteful expenditure on the politically inspired nuclear programme".[1] This analysis found wide support from his colleagues.

Labour also castigated the Conservative Party for accepting a truncated Navy which was able only to mount one amphibious task force. This meant that the government was incapable of dealing with two emergencies, "of the Kuwait type", simultaneously should they arise. The problem was diagnosed by Mr. Healey with great force. "Most difficult of all we may have to face eight or nine or a dozen simultaneous actions in different parts of the world. This is the really serious and dangerous problem we face".[2] The strategic position was even more suspect because of the difficulties of keeping large bases, the problem of overflying rights and the extraordinary care needed for acclimatising troops who might be needed East of Suez yet were training in Europe or were stationed in the bracing climate of Rhine Westphalia. The solution Labour advocated was quite simply to build "... a modern amphibious warfare squadron which can stay at sea much longer and hover round the crisis point..."[3]

Labour's intention to improve the navy was very much related to the wider objective to make Britain's forces more mobile. The requirements

[1] Harold Wilson, Forum Cinema, Plymouth, 27th September 1964.

[2] Healey, D. Vol. 690, H. of C. 26th February, 1964, Col. 472.

[3] Taverne, D. Vol. 690, H. of C. 27th February, 1964, Col. 739.

of 'mobility' were seen to be critical for the success of the whole policy. It was considered as the most likely method of decreasing the disparity between capabilities and commitments. Increasing mobility was seen as popular escape from painful decisions about the curtailment of commitments.

Transport command, Labour contended, had been recklessly neglected by the Conservatives and was in urgent need of strengthening. Mr. Healey also emphasized the increasing role for helicopters and suggested that they were more relevant than "... weapons which we are unlikely ever to use and could certainly never use alone".[1] This was more than the obligatory reference to nuclear weapons. Mr. Healey, though, also admitted that "Nothing costs more than mobility, particularly the sort of mobility that makes us less dependent on fixed bases... It is no good imagining that we can do all these things and go on doing all the other things we have been trying to do and still keep the defence costs at anything like 7% of the total national wealth."[2] Unhappily, this admission failed to constitute an actual prediction.

Labour's emphasis on mobility was expressive of a determination that Britain's presence East of Suez should be less dependent on costly bases, which were believed to be of diminishing value. Labour's East of Suez policy amounted to the belief that it would be politically more sensible to rely less on bases and more on a sea and air presence. Certain bases, it was said, with Aden as a case in point, had become unwieldy commitments themselves rather than the means of fulfilling commitments.[3]

[1] Healey, D. Vol. 687, H. of C. 16th January, 1964, Co. 6547.

[2] Vol. 690, H. of C. 26th February, 1964, Col. 475.

[3] Aden was seen as "... an essential staging post in our communication with the East, particularly India and also Malaysia, to whose support against external aggression we are fully committed as the Government". Wilson, H. Vol. 696, H. of C., 17th June, 1964, Vol. 1403.

The inevitable conclusion for the R.A.F. of Labour's proposal to run down a number of unspecified overseas bases, was that air support for commando task forces was likely to come increasingly from the Fleet Air Arm. It was then not unreasonable indeed a dead certainty that Labour would want a new carrier, and indeed Mr. Healey argued that "... if we are to have a really effective military capacity outside Europe, we must provide air cover for it in the form of naval aircraft. It is no good having just one aircraft carrier floating around because there is no guarantee that it will be in the right place, or indeed not in dock, at the time when it is needed".[1] This was indeed to be one aircraft carrier which was destined never to sail. Two years later that decision had to be faced. The carrier was not even built.

Once Labour had decided that its defence policy should be based on mobility it then had to decide which projects were really necessary and could be afforded. Under the Conservatives, the navy had been promised a new carrier and a Sea-Vixen replacement: the Army, a long range strategic troop carrier, the HS681: the RAF a replacement for the Canberras and Hunters. Mr. Healey, believing Mr. Thorneycroft's aircraft programme to be recklessly extravagent, argued that a future Labour government ... cannot possibly do all those things and keep the defence budget within more or less 7% of the G.N.P...."[2] He went on to say that "... it is quite impossible for us to carry all these projects to completion".[3] This qualification of course did not preclude the pursuit of some of these projects. However, as we have seen, even if Labour's opposition to these projects implied future contraction of the

[1] Healey, D. Vol. 690, H. of C. 26th February 1964, Vol. 475.

[2] Vol. 687, H. of C., 16th January, 1964, Col. 539.

[3] ibid.

Tory aircraft programme, Labour was still proposing an extensive improvement in Britain's East of Suez capability. Not the least of these was Labour's plan to grapple with the manpower situation.

Mr. Wilson was particularly concerned with the presumed inadequacy of the strategic reserve. He argued somewhat sardonically that Britain could not run a strategic reserve on the principle "... of a stage army, where half a dozen minor actors moving quickly behind the scenes can represent the whole of Ceasar's legions..." He concluded that it "... may be alright for a second-rate repertory company, but it is not a sound basis for Britain's defence policy."[1] Mr. Healey too took up this theme and said he was concerned about the extent of the manpower shortage. "... if public order breaks down in British Guiana.... if there is trouble in the Protectorates, or if there is even a marginal increase in guerilla activities in Borneo, it will be absolutely impossible for us to meet these additional commitments without defaulting on some of the commitments which we have already".[2] The problem of overstretch clearly concerned Labour's future defence secretary.

Labour's defence plans for the East of Suez area showed how emphatically the Party was committed to improving Britain's ability to handle her imperial commitments, but it also indicated the enormity of demand that the East of Suez role would make on Britain's limited defence resources. A close examination of Labour's European policy revealed that the continental commitment also, was likely to make serious demands. Labour could scarcely expect to make defence savings there; indeed the foreign exchange loss would continue.

[1] Vol. 670, H. of C. 31st January, 1963, Col. 1243.

[2] Vol. 687, H. of C., 16th January, 1964, Cols.

Labour, in line with all post-war Governments, saw Britain's commitment to N.A.T.O. as the centrepiece of its defence policy. Labour appeared determined that the B.A.O.R. should not be reduced by activities outside Europe, but it was committed to finding another 3,000 men to bring the figure up to the promised level of 55,000. According to Mr. Wilson, "Labour's main point of difference with the Conservative Government is a feeling that Britain is not making a sufficient contribution to N.A.T.O. in conventional terms."[1] Labour had, in fact, consistently criticised the Tories for allowing a run down in agreed force level in Europe.

Labour's commitment to a conventional build up in Europe was consistently advocated in policy documents. *Policy for Peace* insisted that "The West must never be the first to use the H Bomb",[2] and even that N.A.T.O. should never find it necessary to "... be the first to use nuclear weapons of any kind".[3] Consequently, the logical objective for the West was "to make it possible for N.A.T.O. to halt a local conflict with conventional weapons alone".[4] It was apparently only by a build up of conventional forces in Europe that Britain could avoid "... the choice between surrender or world nuclear war".[5] Labour feared nuclear escalation more than a relatively large conventional build-up in Europe.

This statement of the stark alternative resulting from the existing European policy, indicated beyond peradventure that a Labour Government would consider the European situation of vital importance for Britain's security and, of the nuclear threshold could be raised, worthy of

[1] Cited by Foot, P. Op. cit., p.209, comment by Mr. Wilson in The New York Times, 1st April, 1963.

[2] Policy for Peace 1961. Cited Twelve Wasted Years, 1963, p.396.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Policy for Peace 1961. Cited Twelve Wasted Years, 1963, p.396.

[5] Ibid.

considerable resource allocation. Nor was the problem only one of manpower. B.A.O.R. it was said was "... not merely undermanned..." but "... seriously lacking in means of transport and modern conventional weapons and equipment of almost every kind."[1] Not surprisingly Labour concluded that "... drastic remedial measures" were urgently required, because under Labour Britain's conventional forces would become a sophisticated instrument for the pursuit of strategic interests. There was then a strategic motive behind Labour's thinking. This was made clear by Mr. Wilson when he asked the House "... how far can we take these decisions to run down the numbers in Germany at a time when the U.S.-German special relationship is just beginning to develop in the way it is?"[2] Mr. Wilson's argument was that if Britain, like France, became an irresponsible ally, then the Western alliance would be transformed by the growth of a Washington-Bonn axis. Moreover, in military terms Labour was worried about the dangers of Germany dominating the continent, since it had traditionally seen N.A.T.O. as a means of constraining, as well as of defending, the Federal Republic. Labour's plan to improve the manpower situation in Europe would have proved a huge financial undertaking, but it is significant that it was not based on conscription or selective service, but on voluntary recruitment, suitably attracted by economic incentive.

Even, therefore, in the unlikely event of a significant qualitative improvement, under Labour, in the conventional capabilities of Britain's defence force, the East of Suez role would have to share with Europe, though not necessarily in equal proportion, any new defence resources. However, despite the fact that Europe was Britain's primary security interest, the

1 Twelve Wasted Years, 1963, p. 398.

2 Vol. 687, H. of C., 16th January, 1964, Col. 450.

continent was strategically-speaking in a state of military deadlock and therefore, Labour's anxieities centred increasingly on the role Britain could play in those turbulent areas East of Suez. Mr. Wilson emphatically declared to an American audience that Britain's contribution would "... be more and more in Africa and Asia".[1]

While Labour's declarations on the European and East of Suez roles was confusing, it was not inconsistent. The European role was considered the more critical, but in 1964 Labour was more concerned with equipping for an East of Suez role where the threat to British interests was less severe but more immediate. Clearly, if Britain's defence plans under Labour prospered the East of Suez role would gather more momentum and resources than Europe; while if a defence cut-back were found imperative, East of Suez and not Europe would be the area to feel the chilling wind of any economic sqeeze.

The question of whether East of Suez or Europe would be adversely affected by a defence squeeze, raised the acute and overriding problem of whether defence savings could be made elsewhere. In Labour's pre-election view this was indeed possible and such hopes revolved around the nuclear deterrent. This weapon-system could be phased out of existence and Labour appeared determined to implement its pledge to do so.

The Labour Party, since 1961, had raucously accused the Conservatives of suffering from a nuclear illusion. This illusion had resulted, Labour claimed in the run-down of Britain's conventional forces and was epitomised by the 'massive retaliation' doctrine which "... ignored the manifold dangers arising from possible limited aggression in Europe, or elsewhere, in which purely conventional challenge might be encountered".[2]

[1] From a speech at Bridgeport University, Connecticut, U.S.A., 3rd March, 1964.

[2] Twelve Wasted Years, 1963, p.390.

Harold Wilson jocularly underlined the futility of Britain's nuclear policy, but likening it to an effort to kill "a mosquito with a hand grenade".[1] His humour on such a subject no doubt compensated for the rhetorical passion nuclear weapons often excited on Labour's back benches.

According to Labour, Britain's nuclear independence was exposed as a national fraud by the scandal of missile misadventures funded by the Conservative government after it had become apparent that long range bombers would soon be obsolete. The misadventures, Labour catalogued, were Blue Streak, which was ".... hopelessly vulnerable to a first strike"[2], and whose failure cost the nation £300 million; and the 'missile that never was' - Skybolt - a weapon which Labour doubted could be described as prolonging Britain's nuclear independence since it was to be ".... developed and manufacturers wholly in the U.S."[3] Labour also opposed further ".... pointless expenditure on the stand-off flying bomb, Blue Steel",[4] and pledged itself to 'de-negotiate' the Nassau Agreement. The Polaris deal that MacMillan had negotiated in December 1962 was anathema to Labour and had to be reversed.

Labour spokesmen never tired of attributing Britain's defence weakness to the nuclear deterrent. Mr. Wilson argued that "... the vast expenditure of money and resources upon the deterrent has undermined our ability to deploy urgently needed resources, both on manpower and equipment and on mobility."[5] Further on in the same speech he strongly repeated this charge. "I believe also, that our expenditure on the nuclear effort has had, and will have if it is continued, serious and limiting

[1] Op. cit.,

[2] Op. cit. p. 391.

[3] Twelve Wasted Years, 1963, p. 391.

[4] Twelve Wasted Years, 1963, p. 393.

[5] Vol. 687, H. of C. 16th January, 1964, Col. 440.

effects on our ability to build up adequate conventional forces..."[1] Labour believed that cost-escalation was a function of the nuclear deterrent.

It was however uncertain just what Labour would do with the independent deterrent. Even by Labour's elaborately contrived standards of obscurantism on defence, Labour's nuclear policy was a remarkable piece of double-think.

Mr. Wilson told the House of Commons nine months before that 1964 election that Labour would "re-negotiate this agreement to end the proposal to buy Polaris submarines from the U.S."[2] This view fired a passionate response from his colleagues.

Mr. Healey warmly supported his leader's views on the deterrent. When referring to the then Minister of Defence, he said, "I cannot help feeling that, in his attachment to a force which could never be used alone and is most unlikely to be used at all, the Right Hon. Gentleman is tying up a percentage of the defence vote and defence manpower which will make it totally impossible for this country to carry out its obligations to the Alliance or its role in the world".[3] Even more emphatically Mr. Healey contended that "The question is whether we not have adequate conventional forces for our commitments, and I do not believe that it is possible to have adequate forces unless we give priority to them at the expense of the nuclear deterrent".[4] If this were correct, then Labour's subsequent decision to retain the deterrent, by definition would result in greatly weakened conventional forces and renewed tension

[1] Vol. 687, H. of C., 16th January, 1964, Col. 443.

[2] Vol. 687, H. of C., 16th January, 1964, Col. 444.

[3] Vol. 690, H. of C., 26th February, 1964, Col. 483.

[4] Vol. 687, H. of C., 16th January, 1964, Col. 548.

between her European and East of Suez roles. And that is exactly what happened, although the explanation for this was not what Healey had supposed.

The relevance, conceptually at any rate, both for the East of Suez and European policies, of Labour's proposed abdication of nuclear independence was obvious. An enhancement of Britain's ability to pursue these roles, according to Labour, depended on the abandoment of nuclear pretensions. Indeed, Mr. Healey promised ".... more affective conventional forces if we spent on mobility, fire power and conventional equipment the 200 million pounds a year which we are now spending on the nuclear deterrent".[1] The Manifesto, too, clearly reflected Labour's attachment to conventional forces, "Our stress will be on the strengthening of our conventional regular forces so that we can contribute our share to N.A.T.O. defence and also fulfil our peace-keeping commitments to the Commonwealth and the U.N."[2] The unresolved question that remained, however, was whether the European or East of Suez role would derive most from this nuclear abstinence.

Labour's heady expectations of making defence savings were not based entirely on potential nuclear economies. Apart from the savings which were expected to flow from the dissolution of the independent nuclear deterrent and perhaps through the closure of certain unspecified bases, it was confidently expected that further savings could be made by removing the duplication in service structure. Labour's answer was "Drastic rationalisation and reorganisation....".[3] It appeared the logical

1 Vol. 687, H. of C. 16th January, 1964, Col. 546.

2 The House of Commons, 1964, p.281.

3 Twelve Wasted Years, 1963, p. 400.

solution for Labour now much impressed by cost-benefit analysis.

This determination to rationalise and reorganise defence, neatly encapsulated the great faith Labour placed in scientific or technical solutions to Britain's intractable problems. It was the modern or new frontier image which was projected through the "let's go with Labour" slogan. It carried conviction too for another reason as well. The substitution of science for socialism indicated a disillusionment with traditional socialist principles. Labour offered the voters "... not a crusade but a better computer".[1]

The scientific approach, it was thought, was markedly relevant in the defence field whereso much waste had occurred. This emphasis on technology was in part seen as an electioneering asset since it empties ".... socialism of divisive politics within or outside the party".[2] The sterile debate about the bomb and Clause 4 was lost in the neutral vocabulary of technological data, but nevertheless, 'science' was not just an expendient, it reflected a very real hope within the Labour Party that modernisation could be carried forward into Britain's industrial infrastructure.

The forward-looking image of the Labour Party was embodied by its leader who was seen as a pragmatic man, a good economist, a man deeply steeped in modern technology and convinced of its role in a technetronic society. He was no ideologue. Moreover, Mr. Wilson was to become the youngest Prime Minister of the century and this stimulated a comparison with President Kennedy. The Labour leader was packaged as a facsimilie as any middle-aged English Prime Minister could be, to the virile and

[1] Economist, Vol. 212, 11th July, 1964, p.127.

[2] Fairlie, Henry, Sunday Times, 4th July, 1964.

the dynamic, self-confident, young American who had before his tragic death resided so resplendently in the White House. Mr. Wilson was notoriously impressed by the image building process that was said to explain John Kennedy's successful bid for the Presidency and Labour's leader now a matured leader himself "... introduced the Kennedy rhetoric of dynamism and change."[1]

The analogy between the Wilson and Kennedy administrations had another dimension as well. There developed within the Labour Party, a desire to emulate the American political process. The ethos of science and technology displaced socialist values. Cost effectiveness superceded the class-war Clause 4 mentality. Moreover, Mr. Healey emerged as a thoroughly good imitation of Mr. McNamara, a man capable of implementing scientific methods to defence administration.[2] But the real test that Mr. Healey faced was the problem "of reconciling past images with the hard realities of the moment".[3]

It soon became plain how Labour intended to reconcile its plans to make defence savings while simultaneously improving Britain's European and overseas capabilities. It was to be accomplished by abandoning any notion of nuclear independence and by a new cost-effective approach to defence which, amongst other things, would avoid the procurement of defence projects which might later prove unviable or obsolescent.

While such an analysis looked plausible, it was, of course based on a questionable assumption: that Britain's nuclear weapons were a vast

[1] Foot, P. Op. cit., p.116.

[2] The Policies of Power, op. cit. p. 277.

[3] Baylis, John, et. al., Contemporary Strategy, 1975, p.266.

financial albatross and that Labour would still want, and be able, to abandon them when it gained power. Other assumptions were also made: that there existed a great amount of waste in Britain's defence system. Indeed waste similar in relative size to that found in 1961 by Kennedy and MacNamara were presumed to exist.

However, even accepting that Labour's assessment of nuclear costs and the benefit of cost effectiveness were almost right, it appeared an inevitable conclusion that Labour's defence proposals in Europe and East of Suez would conflict with the economic realities of Britain's position and with Labour's own decision to make defence economies. Even the less ambitious Conservative policy of 1964, working on a budget of 7% G.N.P., had not taken into account several proposed new weapons programmes. Mr. Healey, in fact, argued that in the 1964 Defence White Paper there had been "... no allowance for major projects over the whole field of defence other than £18½ million for the first Polaris submarine, but the Government have committed themselves in principle to start in the next three years four major new weapons projects, each of which has a cost running into hundreds of millions of pounds".[1]

Moreover, Mr. Healey was quick to point out that a significant proportion of any increase in G.N.P. would be taken up by ".... natural increases in pay and allowances..."[2] In addition he also argued that "... owing to the fantastic speed of weapons development the cost of weapons is rising about ten times as quickly as is G.N.P."[3], and claimed that the result was that "... as the cost of weapons systems rises one is faced not only with a choice between commitments but a choice between strategic roles. One may even be faced with a choice between Services..."[4]

[1] Vol. 690, H. of C. 26th February, 1964, Col. 467.

[2] Vol. 690, H. of C., 26th February, 1964, Col. 467.

[3] Vol. 687, H. of C., 16th January, 1964, Col. 538.

[4] ibid.

Given the enormously ambitious nature of Labour's defence policy, the inevitable absorption of a bigger budget in pay and allowances and the inherent escalation in defence costs, it was not improbable that Labour would have to retreat from at least one of its main defence objectives on assuming office. The future of Britain's East of Suez role was thus questionable even before Labour came into office. This was indeed ironic given the importance of the overseas presence in Labour's foreign and defence thinking.

It is certainly a dubious business to deduce definite conclusions from the defence policy of an opposition party in the run-up to an election. At such times spokesmen of all parties tend to favour statements that are as generalised and as obscure as electoral considerations allow. However, Labour's 1964 Defence Policy was more distinctive and more specific than in any previous post-war campaign. Labour's 1964 Defence Policy was a classic example of overcommitment. It was compounded of folly and wisdom. The folly of trying to sustain existing commitments with what appeared to be existing capabilities and the wisdom of advocating reliance on NATO and a close strategic relationship with the United States.

The Conservatives own projected defence policy would have made necessary a budget in excess of 7% G.N.P., yet Labour, while still demanding that defence costs must be cut, proposed improvements across the entire defence spectrum. Its policy demanded improvements in manpower, amphibious and submarine capability, transport command, fleet air arm, helicopters, tanks and other army equipment and conventional naval weapons.[1] According to the *Spectator*, Labour's emphasis on improving

[1] See Wilson, H. Vol. 687, H. of C., 16th January, 1964, Col. 445.

Britain's conventional forces "... may conceivably mean conscription but it will certainly mean an increased expenditure on conventional arms which cannot be borne without a larger total defence budget or cuts in nuclear defence".[1] In the event, with unfortunate consequences, Labour only marginally cut its nuclear defence, while quite substantially cutting its defence budget.

The enormous breadth of Labour's foreign and defence policies was due in part to the need of presenting a manifesto worthy of a potential government as well as the normal procedure of election auctioneering, to the need to impress different sections of the Party and to the Party's limited interest in and knowledge of defence matters. The tendency for opposition parties to dwell on aspirations and to arrive at "perfectionist" policies, was well illustrated by the Labour Party in October 1964. In Labour's case this tendency was greatly strengthened because it had been compelled after 1961 to respond to the arguments of the nuclear pacifists within the Labour movement with an articulate and comprehensive defence policy. In order to refute the unilateralists there was a greater effort to formulate and explain specific policies and as a result Labour acquired its ambitious politico-strategic programme. The Labour leadership felt compelled to respond to the C.N.D. challenge and in the process over-responded by producting an over detailed defence programme. Moreover, these policies had to be radically different from those pursued by the Conservatives.[2] The traditional image of Britain as a Great World Power and the reality of her much reduced status confounded those responsible for making important foreign and defence policy decisions. Labour hoped

[1] Spectator, 6th March, 1964, p. 301, Vol. 212.

[2] See discussion of this problem of relating changes in power to decisions in Sprout, Harold and Margeret, Retreat from World Power. Processes and consequences of readjustment, World Politics, 1963.

to do rather better than the Conseratives in this respect. Labour set out to formulate a consistent, comprehensive and alternative defence policy irrespective of economic conditions. They succeeded.

Nor is it easy for an opposition party to take account of the nation's immediate economic position while formulating its defence policy, since a policy evolves over a period of time that may span many periods of stop-go economic strategies. When Labour took up the responsibilities of office its more extravagent policies slowly gave way to more realistic if not objective assessments. However the abandonment of idealistic perfectionist objectives for more realistic and objective goals was not easily made and the early post-election optimism, as epitomised by the 'hundred days' mentality, was not deflated for some time. Facing intractable realities was to prove a painful business.

In the peculiar drama of the 1964 election campaign it was not surprising that Labour had devised a broad policy which provided that no doors should be shut until power had been gained and new information, available only to a government party, studied. This tendency for an opposition party to erect a policy devised to give itself a free hand when it is elected was less apparent in Labour's case than is customary, because, for reasons already discussed, Labour had found it necessary to be more specific about its policies. Nevertheless, it was still a factor. Labour was after all seeking power after thirteen years of Conservative rule. Labour in finding issues to berate the Government of the day, was, in fact, in the very process of criticism, embracing new commitments itself. The Conservative failure to honour its pledge on the European

force level became an issue over which Labour could condemn the Tories. However, by accusing the Conservatives of breaking this pledge Labour was in fact committing itself to do better. They felt confident enough that Tory pledges dishonoured would become Labour's honoured commitment. Labour was confronted by a particular problem that the Conservatives were never expected to face. The Conservative Party traditionally was not obliged to defend its policy as other than in the 'national interest'. This was not so with the Labour Party, which not only 'realistically' accepted the traditional'national interests', as Attlee's Government had made clear, but found it expedient to extol some socialist values, or at least to respect some ideological commitments inherited from the past. Ideology is functional to Labour in Opposition; it becomes a definite liability in office. This tendency to relegate socialist ideology when in power is most marked in the field of defence and foreign policies. The opposite tendency to elevate socialist ideology when in opposition to the point of its becoming the chief determinant of policy becomes almost but not quite so marked.

The interdependence between realism and idealism in Labour's policy formulation leads to a contradictory and confused outcome. Labour's obsession with nuclear weapons could not be exorcised solely by advocating the scrapping of Polaris, or by advocating a non-nuclear club; realism demanded that this could only be done by also giving N.A.T.O. the capability to wage a full-scale conventional war in Europe. It was this special combination of idealism and realism that led the Labour Party of 1964 to pledge itself to build up conventional forces, simply because an enhanced conventional capability would indubitably

restore Britain's credibility after a Labour Government had given vent to its deep anti-nuclear revulsion and abandoned Polaris.

The Labour Party at the level of its parliamentary leadership found itself in the unhappy position of having to play down party idealism and ideological commitment. Labour, certainly on this occasion, felt constrained to erect grandiose defence policies as a counterbalance to its own suspect pacifist tradition, and so-called Utopian propensities, to the argument that it was fundamentally 'unpatriotic', and to the claim that it was opposed to adequate defence measures for the nation. Despite the obsurdity of the notion that Labour governments tend to neglect defence - for which there is no real evidence - the myth still persists, perhaps because Labour emphasizes social and economic goals rather more emphatically than the search for national security.

Polaris in fact epitomised the clash between Party idealism and the reality of international politics. In Opposition, labour had calculatedly put Party idealism first by promising to abandon Polaris, and subsequently, in its bid for an alternative strategy, it wanted to increase conventional forces on the strength of the expected Polaris cancellation. In the event however Polaris was not scrapped since realism dictated that it should be retained as a political instrument in alliance bargaining. Consequently, in 1964, Labour found itself with the most elaborate of defence policies - pledged to build up conventional strength in order to abandon a weapon that in fact it could no longer afford to relinquish and still less relegate for the possible tender use of less squeamish powers.

Labour's plans to improve Britain's European and East of Suez capability meant in terms of manpower and equipment that defence savings were unlikely to be achieved. It must be emphasized that Labour's defence policy was premissed on a very doubtful equation, that a non-nuclear policy and increased cost-effectiveness would permit improvements in Britain's East of Suez and European capabilities, but would also allow for substantial defence savings. Labour hoped that the economy would grow and thus allow the lifting of the defence ceiling but probably preferred that there would be room for much greater efficiency within the existing budget which the new policies would facilitate. Nevertheless, Labour's defence spokesmen genuinely felt that stringent re-organisation and economic advance could be achieved. Clearly it was in a sense inevitable that Labour's hopes were to be limited to re-organisation.

There was a certain enevitability that, on coming into office, Labour would soon have to re-cast its defence policy. This was to be all the more regrettable because almost for the first time in its chequered history Labour had drawn up a totally comprehensive programme, whereas in the past it had only vague sentiments encapsulated in slogans reflecting ideological as well as national commitments. In Opposition, Labour had constructed a rational and indeed ambitious defence policy allowing greater flexibility and efficiency in executing both in Europe and East of Suez, a variety of strategic tasks. The major concern had been to formulate a defence policy which would underpin foreign policy, rather than to formulate a defence policy which would be consistent with Labour's economic strategy.[1] Clearly Labour also lacked a theory of political economy and this too weakened its projected defence and foreign policies.

[1] See C. H. Bartlett, The Long Retreat: a Short History of British Defence Policy 1945-1970, 1972, p.11.

C H A P T E R VI

DEFENCE AND ECONOMIC CONSTRAINT: LABOUR'S DIMINISHING OPTIONS

On 15th October, 1964, Labour won the General Election, albeit by the narrow margin of five seats. For most of the Labour members returned to Parliament by that election campaign after thirteen years in the political wilderness, the mood was one of exhilaration.[1] The Party's optimism hovered on the euphoric and, in rather more subdued terms, it aroused a similar response from the electorate. Even some traditional Conservative voters were not unimpressed by promises of "a second industrial revolution", and the prospect of "a dynamic hundred days".

However, regardless of whatever the future held, the nation in October 1964 faced an economic crisis. Mr. Wilson later observed that "grimmest of all, there was the economic news, the monthly trade returns for September showing a serious continuing deficit had been published that morning. There had been talk in the last hours of the Conservative Government of raising bank rate by a point to stem any selling of sterling as a result of the trade figures. But it was decided to take no action. Worse, there was the Treasury's assessment of the forward balance-of-payments position. Prepared as is the practice before every election for a possible new Government, it showed a position still more serious - to judge from the ex-Chancellor's subsequent statements in the House of Commons, where he was talking of much smaller figures - than the last assessment prepared a month earlier for the Conservatives.

In the face of all this, there could be no question of 'low-profile government' or of having a period of three months or more in

[1] Dalton, H. Memoirs 1945-60, High Tide and after, 1962. Dr. Dalton described an earlier electoral victory in ringing terms. "We felt exalted, dedicated, walking on air, walking with destiny". This was not quite the mood in October 1964 but a spirit of optimism did pervade Labour's excited ranks.

which no decisions needed to be taken.

The pattern our first hundred days would have to take was set in the first hundred minutes". In its electoral campaign, Labour has consistently pointed out the country's economic plight and even when the election was won, Labour, perhaps already aware of the need for an early dissolution, continued to dwell on Britain's structural weakness. The situation was indeed bad, for the new Government had been left a crippling legacy of an £800 million balance of payment deficit.

Although many economists pressed hard for devaluation, both the Treasury and the Bank of England opposed it. In fact what proved decisive was American pressure against devaluation and Harold Wilson's own obsessive fear (remembering 1949) that Labour might get a wretched reputation as 'the devaluation party'. The pound was to the Prime Minister a national virility symbol and he was determined to defend it to the bitter end; moreover he had long held the view that British industry must be made more efficient.[1] However, if devaluation were ruled out from a potent brew of economic and political motivation, and deflation rejected for electoral reasons, the new Government was left with no clear economic strategy.[2] But Mr. Wilson saw it differently and explained in his own account of these decisions that "I was convinced, and my colleagues agreed, that to devalue could have the most dangerous consequences.

The financial world at home and abroad was aware that the post-war decision to devalue in 1949 had been taken by a Labour Government. There would have been many who would conclude that a Labour Government facing difficulties always took the easy way out by devaluing the pound.

[1] See Wilson, Harold. The Labour Government, 1974, pp. 26-29.

[2] Wilson, Harold, op. cit., p.27.

Speculation would be aroused every time that Britain ran into even minor economic difficulties - or even without them. For we were to learn over the years that it was all too easy for those so minded to talk the pound down on the most frivolous pretexts."[1]

The initial economic measures introduced just eleven days after gaining office were doubtful as regards economic benefits to the nation, but dramatic in terms of the international repercussions they precipitated. On 26th October, Labour introduced a 15% import surcharge and offered rebates to exporters. This totally unexpected package greatly upset Britain's partners in E.F.T.A. and condemnation of the measures was widespread. Moreover with consummate ill-timing, the haples Patrick Gordon Walker in New York promised that the Government had "... no intention of raising the Bank Rate".[2]

On 3rd November, the gold reserve dropped to their lowest point since 1961. Just a week later came the first of a long and mediocre series of Callaghan mini budgets. This particular one was mildly deflationary, including as it did sixpence extra on income tax and petrol. The deflationary nature of the budget however, placed the Chancellor in a rather exposed position. He wanted to restore confidence in the pound and yet he did not want to cause anxiety to the left-wing within his own party. To his credit he nearly reconciled these two apparently incompatible objectives. However, his effort to obscure the deflationary effect of the budget from his ever watchful back-benchers was so successful, that it also apparently escaped the notice of the international bankers.

[1] ibid., p.28.

[2] Cited Foot, P., Op. cit., p.156.

As a piece of economic psychology the budget was doomed for it gave priority to plans for an increase in pensions and announced the abolition of prescription charges at a time of crisis.

Money continued to pour out of London and yet the suggestion by the Governor of the Bank of England (Lord Cromer) that Bank Rate should be increased by 1% met with a cool response. The Government believed that to adopt such an increase would both break an electoral pledge and provoke the United States. This was certainly the case.

It was Washington alone that influenced Labour. The Party was sensitive to the views of central bankers, left wingers, trade unionists and the City, and was anxious not to offend any of these centres of influence. It followed, according to the *Economist*, that from the "... five possible remedies for basic imbalance - devaluation, sizeable export incentives, high interest rates, capital controls or full scale deflation - the Government initially made a determined choice. This was that it would choose none of them".[1]

Thursday, the day on which Bank Rate is normally altered, passed and the run on the pound grew more severe. Gold Reserves were used to support the pound, but millions were lost. It was now that Mr. Wilson performed a violent manoeuvre. On the following Monday, the 23rd November, Bank Rate was finally, but reluctantly raised. The economic situation still took a plunge. The monthly gold reserve returns on 2nd December showed a fall of £39 million to the lowest point for several years.

In spite of appeals to 'the Spirit of Dunkirk', the Government

[1] Economist, 28th November, 1964, p.944.

itself seemed to lack urgency. Perhaps it comforted itself in the well-founded assumption that the U.S. would underpin the pound, and together with the 'Basle Club', the Americans came to Britain's assistance to the tune of £3,000 million. For the moment the speculators were thwarted and the New Year came in on a spirit of qualified optimism.

The Government's optimism sprang, not only from the American loan, but also from the introduction of its income policy in December, 1964. Mr. Brown was able to wave triumphantly a 'declaration of intent'. This proved to by a pyrrhic victory.

The economic crisis inevitably provided a volatile and intimidating climate in which to formulate foreign policy. And yet Labour's foreign policy orthodoxy, as pronounced in the election campaign, remained the basis of future planning. The Government was convinced that it had found the right formula and essentially the proper priorities.

As in practically all areas of government, so in the foreign policy field, the Prime Minister balanced off the different wings of the Party. Messrs. Gordon Walker, Healey and Bottomley were offset by Mr. Greenwood at the Colonial Office and Mrs. Castle at the Ministry of Overseas Development. Mr. Wilson explained this balance as instrumental in bringing about 'creative tension' - to many it looked like a deliberate attempt to reduce tension by a policy of 'divide and rule.' At any rate the balance of the foreign affairs team made it extremely remote that any radical re-think in Labour's foreign policy was now possible.

It was not surprising, therefore, that Labour retained the East of Suez bias that had been so marked prior to the election. Mr. Wilson,

a month after that election, argued that ".... in a world where the centre of gravity is shifting more and more to areas outside Europe, we need; not only ourselves but with our allies, particularly the Commonwealth, to ensure that we have the strength and mobility to move quickly to stop small troubles from escalating into bigger ones, especially where the interests of our Commonwealth partners are involved."[1] Britain under this prescription intended to play a major role East of Suez. This speech provoked some astonishment in Europe because of its emphatic endorsement of Britain's world role.

Not only did the new Government appear pro East of Suez, but it also seemed unresponsive if not hostile to Europe. While it wanted to strengthen and improve N.A.T.O. it remained noticeably wary of any clear involvement with its continental allies. This was especially true at the nuclear level. "We believe" the Prime Minister said, "that a mixed manned surface fleet adds nothing to Western strength, is likely to cause a dissipation of East-West agreement".[2] Earlier Mr. Wilson had said that he rejected ".... categorically any idea of a separate European deterrent".[3] These statements and the Prime Minister's subsequent well-publicized trip to Washington, seemed to confirm the importance and relevance of the 'special' relationship' in British foreign policy. In comparison Labour's insistence that it was interested in overt moves on political union in Europe lacked real credibility.

The line of Labour's pre-election foreign policy thus hardened in those first few months of office. The policy so thinly sketched in

[1] Vol. 702, H. of C., 23rd November, 1964, Col. 938.

[2] Vol. 702, H. of C., 23rd November, 1964, Col. 943.

[3] Monday, 17th November, 1964 at the Guildhall.

outline was now given concrete substance. The pro United States feeling was reflected in an Atlanticist determination to strengthen the alliance through greater nuclear co-operation; the anti European sentiment manifested itself in stubborn opposition to the Europeanist M.L.F., even in the face of American and German pressure; and the marked East of Suez bias was reinforced in continuing help for Malaysia in its confrontation with Indonesia. There was then, no direct challenge to the East of Suez role.[1] If it were threatened, it was not by any change in values since the election, but by another of Labour's defence objectives - the one to make savings.

Despite the obvious attraction of defence cuts for left wingers, and some, but by no means all, trade unionists and foreign creditors alike, there was no great pressure on the Government to make such cuts. It was assumed that the economic difficulties were temporary and things would soon improve. The prevalent mood was that once the inherited dislocation had been dealt with Labour could promote a period of planned and spectacular growth.

The Chancellor, in fact, was as complacent as anyone and consequently did not press the Treasury line as forcefully as he might have done. Perhaps Mr. Callaghan's ministerial innocence and the dual economic management under Labour were also factors which could account for the lack of Treasury dominance in the 1964 economic crisis.[2] At any rate, Mr. Callaghan was not strongly disposed to press for immediate and far reaching defence or social service cuts. Although he exerted some pressure in favour of defence savings, he believed, rather like the rest

[1] Professor Michael Howard (then Professor of War Studies in the University of London) wrote in April 1966 that "To the question, what specific long-term national interests does Britain retain East of Suez commensurate with her military expenditure in the area, the answer may be, virtually none." But Labour obviously intended to meet short-term commitments. International Affairs, op. cit., p.182.

[2] Economic Affairs were divided between Mr. Callaghan's Treasury and George Brown's D.E.A.

of the Cabinet, that to painfully save a few shillings in 1964, would be foolish, and largely irrelevant, in view of the impressive growth rate that was inevitable during the next few years.

Furthermore while it was clear that Labour's first concern was to diminish the pressure on the pound, of almost equal importance was the need to ensure that no irreversible decisions were initiated in the short term, which might undermine Labour's long term policy. And an integral part of that long term policy was that defence savings could be made without disturbing the efficiency and balance of British forces. Neither did Mr. Brown press Mr. Healey very hard, for he was largely concered with the need for long term economic planning and anyway, despite being a pro-European, he also accepted the value of the East of Suez presence, because of his concern for international stability upon which Britain's economic recovery heavily depended.[1]

Even the Left, despite the ideological erection that it always experiences when defence cuts are mentioned, refrained from pushing the Government too vigorously during this short-lived honeymood period. Moreover there existed for the Government, one unexpected bonus for having such a wafer-thin Commons majority, and that was that any dissident Labour back-bencher who voted against his Party in Parliament might be responsible for putting the Conservatives back into power. This desperate notion alone was sufficient to persuade most Labour M.P.s of the value of unquestioning fidelity. In any case the Government had diluted the militancy of the Left with promises of social legislation and with positions in Government.[2] The parliamentary ambitions of the left were

[1] Mr. Brown deals at length with his view of Britain's contribution to international stability in his book, In My Way.

[2] Mr. Wilson sought to maintain a political balance between the right and left in his administration. Left-wing members of Parliament were as ambitious as the so-called careerist right.

recognised by the Prime Minister as important elements in maintaining Government unity.[1]

Neither was there great pressure for defence cuts from overseas. The United States did not encourage cuts which would threaten Britain's East of Suez role, and the European Governments felt that cuts were no substitute for the orthodox monetary means of coping with an economic crisis.

The Government, then, was in no way forced into making defence cuts. Indeed the Labour movement was unusually harmonious. The Party itself was willing enough to wait and see what the promised major defence review would bring, and it was, at this stage, confident that the Government would in no way compromise or abandon those 'socialist measures' it had waited thirteen years to introduce.

Even as the economic situation worsened still further it remained curiously apparent that "an extraordinary optimism still pervaded Whitehall".[2] While speculation about economic crisis grew, Mr. Wilson continued to plan for costly methods of Atlantic co-operation in his search for a nuclear depository; there was no move to shelve Polaris; and Mr. Healey gave his assurance on the fleet aircraft carrier "... that all preparatory work ... is going ahead at sufficient speed to enable the order to be placed as planned in 1966".[3]

Nevertheless, defence savings were still the central part of Labour's plan and they soon came to dominate defence policy. Slowly the Government's plans for more public expenditure began to impinge on all aspects of policy. There was no increase of domestic demands, but only an acceptance that the Party's social service commitment was the

[1] Sunday Times, 6th March, 1966, p.28.

[2] The expenditure on overseas operations was according to the Economist heavier "in eighteen months then that of the whole Polaris project up to its completion". Economist, Vol. 213, 21st November, 1964, p.799.

top priority and would inevitably entail sacrifices being made elsewhere.

On the 21st and 22nd November the Labour leadership turned its mind towards defence. The deliberations of that now famous 'weekend of the crunch'were noted apparently for a "... refreshing spirit of cost effectiveness and value for money".[1] The defence weekend at Chequers was later described by the Prime Minister as "the most thorough ever undertaken by the British Government. We began on the Saturday morning in the Hawtrey Room, which was laid out for a screen 'presentation' of Britain's defence commitments, posture and deployment. Each area of the world where British troops were stationed was set out in slide after slide, with full statistics - each type of equipment, military, naval, air. These, together with the presentation - Malaysia, Hong Kong, the Caribbean, the South Atlantic and South Pacific, Cyprus, Aden, the Gulf, the NATO forces by land, sea and air - confirmed our long-held view, so forcibly expressed by George Wigg in our years of Opposition, that Britain's defence forces were over-stretched almost to breaking-point. There was an excessive strain on the troops themselves, especially unaccompanied service. Something had to give: it had to be commitments." Yet the curious fact is that commitments were retained and capabilities were to be diminished. However Richard Crossman noted in his diary that Labour's electoral pledges in regard to the abandonment of the nuclear deterrent had been dishonoured. He noted that the Prime Minister was "trying to get a mandate for proposing a British alternative to the American M.L.F. when he got to Washington. What interested me was the implication that we intended to retain nuclear weapons, not only the means of delivery but also the warheads, and that

Harold Wilson and Denis Healey wouldn't regard this as incompatible with our election pledges because they would claim that our Government was consciously giving up the attempt to have an independent deterrent. Indeed, what they were keeping the weapons for was to try to persuade NATO that in return for our providing weapons as a contribution to the NATO nuclear deterrent we should be permitted to cut down the British Army of the Rhine. I must say I felt extremely dubious about whether our allies would take this proposal very seriously".[1] In the House of Commons debate that immediately followed that weekend meeting, the Prime Minister spoke sympathetically of the Chancellor's "... need and intention to enforce retrenchment".[2] According to the *Economist*, the government was brooding over the fact that Britain was the only European nation with a serious role both inside and outside the continent.[3] On 28th November, the British Ambassador in Bonn, Sir Frank Roberts, reminded his German audience that the foreign exchange cost for the British Army of the Rhine was £285 million a year.[4] Mr. Wilson simply referred to the loss of foreign exchange as "... an impossible situation".[5]

Harold Wilson, in fact was amongst the first to see a link between high defence costs and national insolvency.[6] On the very day Bank Rate was raised he underlined "... the relevance of the high costs of certain sections of the defence programme to our economic situation...[7]

1 Crossman, Richard. The Diaries of a Cabinet Minister, Vol. I, 1975, p.73.

2 Vol. 702, H. of C., 23rd November, 1964, Col. 940.

3 Economist, Vol. 213, 5th December, 1964, p. 113.

4 ibid.

5 Vol. 704, H. of C., 16th December, 1964, Col. 421.

6 Mr. Wilson resigned in 1951 because the programme imposed a strain on Labour's economic and social policies. Harold Wilson's interview with the Observer.

7 Vol. 702, H. of C., 23rd November, 1964, Col. 940.

Mr. Callaghan also caused great political consternation with his statement "... a strict review is taking place over the whole range of Government expenditure including overseas defence commitments in order to secure a reduction in the burden on our balance of payments".[1] In similar vein the Chancellor argued later on, that "... the release of 'resources of skilled manpower' will follow from the Government's review of their defence commitments, including those overseas."[2]

Mr. Healey, too, reiterated the Government's bid to make cuts, but he also made it plain that he could not be expected to make the cuts entirely off his own bat - the foreign office too must take part in the surgery. "The first basic fact, "said Mr. Healey "is that, unless we are to allow our defence expenditure to rise continually not only in absolute terms but also as a percentage of our rising national wealth, we must be prepared to reduce the calls on our military resources. There may be cases - I believe there are - where we find ourselves inheriting commitments from an imperial past which have lost their relevance in the modern world. There may be others where our commitments are based on the false belief that it is still possible, or worthwhile, to use military force against foreign countries purely to protect our national economic interest".[3] Healey looked to the Foreign Office for a lead. He looked in vain. Mr. Healey declared that "in 1964 our foreign policy was much more ambitious than we could afford".[4]

The Prime Minister adopted a neutral position between the Foreign Office and the Ministry of Defence. "There is built into our defence system", he declared, "an unavoidable rate of increase - in the absence

[1] Vol. 702, H. of C., 26th November, 1964, Col. 1477.

[2] Vol. 702, J. of C., 26th November, 1964, Col. 1479

[3] Vol. 702, H. of C., 23rd November, 1964, Col. 1028.

[4] The Policies of Power, op. cit., p.165.

of changes of policy - which will mean, year by year, a crippling increase in the call on resources."[1] In regard to both manpower and equipment Mr. Wilson concluded that "... the plain fact is that we have been trying to do too much".[2] He went on to emphasise the dangers in spending on defence 7.1% of the G.N.P. and warned that the Labour Government could not do all "... that so far has been thought ideally desirable, without fatally weakening our economy and correspondingly, weakening our real defences."[3] The Prime Minister promised "... to look again at our weapons programme..."[4] and Mr. Healey accepted that, in the role outside Europe, it might be possible, "... after rigorous analysis to rule out certain types of sophisticated weapons altogether".[5] He moreover promised to see "... whether we can assure better value for money by examining possible suitable changes in the role, deployment, tactics or equipment of the forces which we have".[6]

Apart from its desire to implement savings through a less wasteful defence policy, Labour also placed much emphasis on the sharing of more defence commitments with Britain's allies. Mr. Healey explained that "Until we make some progress towards disarmament we must therefore see whether we can share the defence burden more effectively with our friends and allies and also with the United Nations. Otherwise, we shall find ourselves compelled by facts to an involuntary and unplanned abdication of responsibilities, perhaps in a moment of crisis, an abdication which would be disastrous not only for our influence in the world but indeed, perhaps for peace itself".[7] Mr. Healey could scarcely have

[1] Vol. 704, H. of C., 16th December, 1964, Col. 420.
[2] Vol. 704, H. of C., 16th December, 1964, Col. 419.
[3] Vol. 704, H. of C., 16th December, 1964, Col. 423.
[4] ibid.
[5] Vol. 704, H. of C., 17th December, 1964, Col. 615.
[6] Vol. 704, H. of C., 17th December, 1964, Col. 616.
[7] Vol. 704, H. of C., 13th November, 1964, Col. 1029.

perceived at that time, that an "unplanned abdication of responsibilities" was only three years away.

Of course, the complex issue of defence savings was bedevilled by the economic crisis and, it was the decision to make defence savings that was to dominate Labour's future defence policy.

Labour found the balance of payments deficit somewhat inhibiting, but it would certainly be unwise, despite the coincidence of economic crisis and talk of defence cuts, to argue that it was just the economic problems facing Labour which provoked the plan to cut defence spending. This was clearly not so. Labour, after all, had threatened such a cut in its election campaign.

Clearly one reason for the delayed impact of the economic situation on defence planning was that there existed great difficulty in making quick defence cuts as a response to economic difficulties. Christopher Mayhew, the Minister of Defence for the Navy, argued that a defence review was a "... problem of enormous complexity, with all the factors interdependent, involving £2000 million and hundreds of thousands of people's jobs all over the world and with repercussions in foreign policy, industry and home politics in every possible way".[1] Defence cuts, then, were not seen as a means to be used in the short term for dealing with the economy. There could be no quick-fix programme of severe cuts, but only the long term implementation of a modern, more efficient, yet cheaper, defence structure.

The economic situation only marginally affected defence policy because the Labour leadership, if anything, failed to grasp the seriousness of the run on the pound.[2] The Cabinet did not propose

[1] Vol. 704, H. of C., 14th December, 1964, Col. 150.

[2] Mr. Wilson admitted later, on 23rd November, 1967, on the ITV programme 'This Week', that the Government had underated the power of speculation at home and abroad to put the pound in jeopardy and force the government to resort to short-term measures. Cited Foot, P., Op. cit., p.196.

defence economies as an answer to the currency speculation. The Government in fact believed that the position could be restored by incremental measures such as the import surcharge and the deferment of specific social legislation. Postponement of legislation, rather than curtailment of commitment, seemed much the most likely outcome.

A far greater influence on Labour's defence policy than the imponderable economic situation was the widespread conviction that Britain had for some time allocated too much of its gross national product on defence to the detriment of its domestic priorities. It was not the short term balance of payments crisis that was the crucial factor, but the assessment that permanent damage had been done to the essential fabric of the Welfare State by allocating too high a percentage of the G.N.P. to defence.

There were though clear and obvious motives for Labour in attributing any defence cuts to the economic hiatus. In this way, the Cabinet might rid itself of any discredit and also - a greater gain - dispel growing anxieties about Labour's determination to manage the economy. The Government thus seized hold of the promise of defence cuts in the course of its struggle to save the pound. The Cabinet in fact reasoned that, if there were going to be a detailed review of defence policy which would almost certainly end in cuts, then those cuts might as well be advertised at a time when it was desirable that foreign creditors should be reminded that Labour was bent upon upholding the existing parity of the pound.

This thesis became compelling through the tortuous events of late November. On the very day that Lord Cromer was arranging a massive loan from the world's central banks, Mr. Callaghan made a surprisingly blunt speech in

favour of defence economies. It was also at the height of the run on the pound, that other Cabinet Ministers suddenly discovered the virtue of advancing the case for making severe defence cuts. In so doing they skillfully steered Labour away from the use of short-term deflationary measures which were so repugnant to the Party.

In fact it became a feature of the Labour Government that, in a crisis, it promised to take special measures some time in the future, in the expectation that such promises would immediately ease short-term difficulties: in other words to use long-term economic measures to gain a short-term effect. Thus, corporation and capital gains taxes were promulgated in advance, but the critical detail of the levels at which they would work was not revealed. Public statements on the necessity of defence cuts were not yet ready to be introduced and the effects of which often, in the event, were quite superficial in character.

The Prime Minister, though, did not let this procedure get too well established. Once the promises of defence cuts had realised their purpose he nullified their impact in case Britain's real position might be misunderstood. Clearly the last fortnight in November and the first two weeks of December were used to reinforce the impression of the possibility of substantial defence economies, just as the remainder of December, with the crisis over for the time being, became a period for quietly telling allies that Britain would after all be honouring her world-wide responsibilities.[1]

While it may have been appreciated abroad, in view of the Government's re-affirmation of the importance of an overseas presence,

[1] On his Washington visit of December 1964 Mr. Wilson explained to the American President the nature of the "special role we could play in Africa, through our close relations with Commonwealth countries". The Labour Government, op. cit. p.78.

was impervious to the Government axe, this was not necessarily the case. The crucial dilemma still persisted: could labour make defence cuts and yet honour all its commitments? This seemed remote for savings would not be conjured out of thin air.

While Labour could manage some saving by making a robust cut in capability, this could only be achieved by a diminution of diplomatic commitment. It had, after all, already undertaken to get manpower and equipment improvements across the whole defence spectrum. It was moreover a fact that in the face of the escalating costs of weapons systems, Governments had to make cuts in order to stabilize the defence budget. If genuine economies were to be made, then, a substantial cut in weapons procurement would be an absolute necessity.[1]

The opportunity of making economies was further fudged by the decision to retain polaris, and by the need to fund those projects started under the Conservatives which were in 1964-65 reaching completion. Mr. Mulley, the Minister of Defence for the Army, pointed out that "Even in the equipment field the long interval between research and development and the acceptance into service means that the opportunities for revision are much more limited than is supposed. It is difficult to influence costs in the short run. During the next year or two we shall be meeting the bills for equipment ordered by the Right Hon. Gentlemen opposite - often which should have been delivered and have been in service several years ago".[2]

Mr. Wilson, too, in a precautionary allusion to defence economies, openly pontificated that "It would be wrong and unrealistic to raise

[1] The strategy of the TSR-2, op. cit., pp. 726-728.

[2] Vol. 704, H. of C., 14th December, 1964, Col. 40.

too many hopes for this coming year, because the 1965-66 estimate largely reflects decisions taken a year or many years before .... and there are sometimes more costs in re-adjusting a programme than even continuing it unchecked...[1] Mr. Reynolds, the Under Secretary of State for Defence for the Army, also reinforced the argument that it would be far from easy to make equipment economies; "We have got to the position where it can no longer be done and the bill must be paid".[2] These statements expressing a rather jaundiced view of the chances of making defence cuts, contrasted dramatically with those made by the Chancellor in the middle of the economic crisis just over a fortnight before.

The possibility of making defence economies was also lessened by a natural reluctance to cut or cancel projects already started under a previous administration and now far advanced. The case of the TSR-2 was a classic example of this phenomenon. Mr. Wilson had this aircraft in mind when he admitted that some projects had nearly gone past the point of return" ... that point in a production programme where it would be more costly to scrap it and replace it by a cheaper equivalent than go on to the bitter end..."[3] Mr. Wilson regarded the TSR-2 with scepticism and admitted in his account of the Labour Government that this aircraft was marked for stringent review. He accepted that "Its costs were escalating out of all relation to earlier estimates, and it was a favourite Treasury target for cancellation under both the Conservative and the Labour Governments. Although it had flown successfully as an empty shell, it had not yet incorporated the expensive and untried avionic

[1] Vol. 704, H. of C., 16th December, 1964, Col. 426-7.

[2] Vol. 704, H. of C., 14th December, 1964, Col. 146.

[3] Vol. 704, H. of C., 16th December, 1964, Col. 426.

equipment on which one of its principal combat roles depended, its contour-flying capacity, flying just above ground level, too low for detection by hostile radar screens. The impossibility of forecasting the cost of getting this equipment right made further cost escalation a virtual certainty".[1]

Another important consideration emerged against making cuts in capability, and this was the one so often referred to by Mr. Healey himself - that the existing forces were overcommitted anyway. To reduce capability would only worsen the overcommitment and destroy morale in the services. It was left though to Mr. Mulley to spell out to the Commons the really insurmountable obstacle in making capability cuts. He insisted that it was a misapprehension that ".... there are a great number of options open to Governments in the defence field...", and claimed "... that the room for manoeuvre is a great deal less than supposed".[2] This was because there was "... a 'hard' element which was a figure which has to be accepted as broadly predetermined by the size of its army - its civilian backing and equipment which it already has and which, therefore, is not susceptible to reduction in the short term.... It means that there is relatively little to play about with as regards new equipment".[3] This observation raised the basic dilemma. If Labour could not cut capability directly, could it do so indirectly by cutting commitment first? Mr. Healey, for one, made no bones about it. He did not believe that Britain could sustain her roles as an independent nuclear power, as a major contributor to allied defence in Europe and as a military power overseas. He argued that "... unless

[1] Wilson, Harold, The Labour Government, 1974, p.72.

[2] Vol. 704, H. of C., 14th December, 1964, Col. 40.

[3] Vol. 704, H. of C., 14th December, 1964, Col. 40.

we are to impose unacceptable strains on our own economy and to carry a handicap which none of our main competitors in world trade has to bear, Britain too must decide which of these three roles should have priority".[1]

There were, however, truly formidable problems in cutting commitments. Labour had promised to fulfil Britain's obligation to Europe and supply the full quota of 55,000 troops to the Rhine Army. Nor could there easily be a sudden withdrawal from the bases East of Suez. Mr. Wilson had earlier put in a "... personal plea..." for Hong Kong, and has also pledged his support for Malaysia against Indonesia. As that confrontation was if anything likely to get worse, Singapore was obviously vital. Labour also emphatically continued to show a gritty determination in regard to Aden "... to retain the base in agreement with the Government of Southern Arabia for so long as it is required to serve the interests which we have in common".[2]

Of course while Labour articulated a strategic philosophy of both a European and a world role, savings would be excruciatingly difficult to find. In fact it could make cuts only for a short time before the philosophy itself would be rendered negatory. The superfluous capacity in Britain's defence structure was perhaps not as excessive as Labour had argued, and the difficulty in making defence savings was certain to heighten the already acute tensions created by the pursuit of a basically unworkable policy. Moreover, even if commitments were cut the Government could not necessarily expect a cut in manpower. A lower commitment would still justify the existing manpower and only a very substantial cut in commitment would make a cut in capability at all

[1] Vol. 702, H. of C., 23rd November, 1964, Col. 1030.

[2] Healey, D., Vol. 703, H. of C., 30th November, 1964, Col. 10, oral answers.

significant or relatively painless.

Labour's entire defence policy was then already beginning to rest on its own dubious assessment that it could as efficiently defend Britain's interests on a defence budget some way below 7% of G.N.P., as the Conservatives could when working on a defence budget perhaps even in excess of 7% G.N.P. Yet put in the starkest terms, how could Labour introduce defence cuts to a point considerably below 7% G.N.P. without restructuring its foreign policy, when the highly predictable escalation in defence expenditure would within a short time take it soaring to yet greater heights? How could Labour make defence cuts when a very costly and not to say dangerous Malaysian commitment had become volatile and was growing daily more onerous? How could defence cuts be reconciled with election hyperbole about improvements for the navy, transport command and B.A.O.R., and with the retention of nuclear weapons. Moreover, Mr. Wilson had declared that "... we need most, if not all, of the bases we now hold..."[1]

In view of the difficulty of making cuts it was not surprising that the *Economist* struck a cautionary note. "In sum, it seems that Mr. Wilson and his advisers will find sadly little scope for cuts in defence expenditure .... they can trim the costs of a base or two here (Hong Kong and Libya and perhaps Aden, are obvious examples) and maybe cause the soldiers and airmen to co-operate more efficiently there. But they cannot get rid of any major obligation nor can they, without introducing conscription substantially change the structure of forces which they inherited".[2]

[1] Vol. 704, H. of C., 16th December, 1964, Col. 425.

[2] Economist, Vol. 213, 21st November, 1964, p.800.

If it were unreasonable to see the fulfilment of spectacular cuts in commitment of capability, then Labour's defence strategy would have to rest insecurely on the assumption that economies could be achieved through stripping out a large amount of waste in the defence budget. Yet even this central assumption was repudiated by Mr. Mulley himself when he admitted that "The costs are high and, short of reducing commitments and hence reducing manpower, they will continue to be high, but defence costs must be understood for what they are. Even if all the waste and muddle ... is eliminated, the costs are bound to be high. Indications are that they will get higher".[1]

As 1964 drew to its seasonal close, then, no real answers had been given as to where the defence economies were to come. It was clear that Labour had promised more cost-effectiveness and 'planning' but while these pentagon inspired concepts may have caused some consternation in certain ministries, its meaning in the context of defence policy was as yet unclear.[2] However, the example of planning, programming and budgetary systems (PPBS) in the US Defence Department had inspired similar procedures in the Ministry of Defence. This was well under way by the time Denis Healey took over.

The Defence White Paper of February, 1965, was impatiently awaited to give preliminary substance to Labour's new policy. In his preparation of that policy statement, one intractable problem faced Denis Healey - how could he, in all conscience, cover foreign policy commitments as large as those proudly sustained by the Conservatives, on a defence budget considerably more modest?

[1] Vol. 704, H. of C., 14th December, 1964, Col. 40.

[2] See Burt, Richard, Defence Budgeting: The British and American Cases, IISS, 1974, pp. 2-8.

There was, then, in the short interval in the post election period the barely concealed beginnings of a headlong retreat from Labour's exposed pre-election defence posture. This was due to the explicable effects of the winning of parliamentary power and to the inevitable contradictions in its own defence policy, than to a change in basic values or indeed their betrayal.

The retreat from Labour's over elaborate defence policy (a headlong retreat that certainly would have occurred independently of the ongoing economic crisis) was, however, not so acute as to overwhelm the overall stance of Labour's grand strategy. It became clear that the dichotomy between the Atlanticist and European defence postures grew more obvious and severe, but there was no sudden or even more considered move to abandon one in favour of the other.

While the parliamentary Left, largely in fact the Tribune Group, might have hoped in a great rush of ideological or pious hope that economic events were about to do, what years of passionate oratory on the iniquity and futility of the world role had failed to do, Mr. Wilson made "... it quite clear that whatever we may do in the field of cost effectiveness, value for money and a stringent review of expenditure, we cannot afford to relinquish our world role...".[1]

Even amongst all the speculation of savage defence cuts the Prime Minister, unashamedly waxed eloquent about the great value of the imperial commitment. He mused about the successful military moves made in the early months of 1964 and expressed with obvious feeling that, if Britain gave up her world role, she would "... be abdicating from what I regard as our duty to the Commonwealth and to world peace and we should

[1] Vol. 704, H. of C., 16th December, 1964, Col. 423.

be abdicating from any hope of real influence in the world..."[1] Mr. Wilson had not become Her Majesty's first Minister to preside over the liquidation of the British Commonwealth.

Despite Mr. Wilson's resignation from the Attlee administration in 1951, on the hoary issue of excessive defence expenditure, he was, in fact, often at his most effective, if not eloquent when insisting with emphasis that Britain should not deny her defence responsibilities in securing peace, "... which is beyond all price and beyond all measurement of economic cost".[2] He was ponderously aware that Britain had a "... unique opportunity to play such a role".[3] While he conceded that, in Europe, Britain was no more powerful than other countries, he noted, with mounting pride that "... none of our continental N.A.T.O. allies, nor any of our associates in the Middle East or Asian alliances can compete with us in the range of the contribution we can make in those vital areas beyond Europe".[4] According to the Prime Minister the East of Suez role was "... one which no one in this House or indeed in the country, will wish us to give up or call in question".[5] There was no clearer, or more emphatically Kiplinesque statement uttered by a Prime Minister since the death of Churchill.

Labour's foreign policy philosophy of a strong Atlantic alliance and a World Role thus remained constant during those first few months in office, even if certain details of that philosophy, such as Aden and the M.L.F., needed definition. In fact, the problems which most obviously pressed themselves upon the now faltering British Government, were raised

[1] Vol. 704, H. of C., 16th December, 1964, Col. 422.

[2] Foot, P., op. cit., p.96.

[3] Vol. 704, H. of C., 16th December, 1964, Col. 424.

[4] ibid.

[5] Vol. 704, H. of C., 16th December, 1964, Col. 421.

by the sale of arms to South Africa and U.D.I. in Southern Rhodesia, and yet all of these were only peripheral to the central doctrine so warmly advocated.

However, even if the overall policy were not immediately in danger the future looked unpromising. Mr. Wilson in a statement which neatly established the interrelationship between economics and foreign policy, unconsciously gave a warning of what fate the external environment had in store when speaking to the trade union congress - "... yes we can borrow .... you can get into pawn, but don't then talk about an independent foreign policy or an independent defence policy".[1] His oratory was to prove ironically prophetic.

[1] Trade Union Congress Report, 1964, p. 383.

C H A P T E R VII

THE INTRODUCTION OF DEFENCE ECONOMIES AND THE MAKING OF DEFENCE POLICY

Of the Cabinet's principal defence objectives in 1965, the most immediately pressing was the one to make defence savings. The widespread view was that if Labour was to implement its ambitious legislative programme without facing recurring economic difficulties, then the spiral in defence costs must be arrested. Mr. Healey was to comment some time later that ".... in the early years everybody saw defence cuts as the answer to the economic problem."[1] The economic situation in Britain continued to deteriorate, and, policy apart, the question of how much could be spared for defence remained unanswered. Healey had committed his Ministry to saving £400 million by reducing defence expenditure to £2,000 million at 1964 press by 1970.

In the short run, the savings envisaged by Labour looked rather modest, but in the long term they were expected to be substantial. This would represent only 5.9% of the G.N.P.[2] The Prime Minister went even further, "If we can get below that £2000 million we shall certainly do so".[3] These figures compared favourably with Conservative estimates which stood at £2176 million for 1965/66 and which, according to the Prime Minister, "... would inevitably escalate at 1964 prices to £2,400 million and more than that if no changes are made."[4]

In July 1965, however, the run on the pound became once again a question of great concern to the Chancellor of the Exchequer. James Callaghan turned to Denis Healey for an assurance that cuts would be

[1] Denis Healey and the Policies of Power, op. cit. p.187.

[2] Vol. 707, H. of C., 23rd February, 1965, Col. 87. Written answers.

[3] Vol. 717, H. of C., 3rd August, 1965, Col. 1265. Oral answers.

[4] Vol. 713, H. of C., 3rd June, 1965, Vol. 1949. Oral answers.

effectively and quickly achieved. Denis Healey responded by announcing at a press conference on 4 August that he was halfway to his target of £400 million in cuts, having so far achieved a total of £220 million.

Public opinion was generally behind him. Most Labour Members of Parliament were interested only in spending less on defence - provided the country did not become defenceless. Healey accepted that "in the early years everybody saw defence cuts as the answer to the economic problem. The tragedy was that the money I saved on defence was squandered on increases in consumption and civil expenditure".[1] (There was little real attempt to curtail civil expenditure until 1969, when Jenkins was Chancellor).[2]

At his press conference Healey said that 'the only real hope of savings lies in the possibility that commitments can be revised'.[3] On 5th August he told the Commons: "I readily confess that to bridge the remaining gap to the target will require redeployment of our forces and a smaller total of manpower in the services".[4]

The Government's determination to make savings, without adversely affecting the security of Britain's supposed interests, largely rested upon the degree of superfluous capability and commitment that existed, and on Labour's ability to pick out and remove any excess. If the Government failed to uncover substantial and indeed appalling waste, it would be forced to examine a number of uniformly unpalatable options - to disregard the £2000 million figure, to give up some commitments it would prefer to continue, or to compel the Services to carry out their duties with insufficient or inferior capability.

[1] Remarks made to author during a lengthy interview.

[2] See Beckerman, W. The Economic Record of the Labour Government, 1964-70.

[3] Denis Healey Press interview, 4th August (Transcript made available by M.O.D.)

[4] Denis Healey and the Policies of Power, op. cit., p. 187.

The Prime Minister was optimistic, but nevertheless conscious of "... the enormous difficulties, in terms of our commitments, in terms of weapons programmes and the rest, of cutting the defence programme from £2475 million to £2000 million".[1] On the other hand, the *Economist* was unequivocably pessimistic, "... there are just not very many cuts to be made, at any rate big ones, at any rate soon".[2]

One of the Government's main frustrations, and perhaps the biggest disappointment as well, was the continuing indispensability of Britain's costly bases. The long-awaited review of Britain's commitment "... base by base and garrison by garrison..."[3], only all too clearly confirmed the already apparent advantages of the bases over any 'alternative strategy'.

The 'alternative strategy' that had caught Labour's interest while in opposition had been based on air trooping and a greater amphibious capability. However the attraction of this 'alternative strategy' was soon scuppered in the face of a mass of Ministry of Defence statistics about its cost. While Mr. Healey continued to accept, in a conceptual sense, the 'general proposition' that a greater amphibious capacity made good sense, with an air of finality he emphasized "... how enormously costly such a force can be".[4] Mr. Mayhew also expressed reservations about air trooping. He warned that "... although the Strategic Reserve is a very fine thing, we do not get it free of charge. When working out any savings from running down bases, we must remember that the Strategic Reserve has to be

[1] Vol. 713, H. of C., 3rd June, 1965, Col. 1949, Oral Answers.

[2] Economist, Vol. 215, 17th July, p. 216. This judgement in part was presumably based on the fact that the winding up of commitments and the reduction of personnel after allow no saving at all while severance pay and aid have to be paid.

[3] Mayhew, C., Vol. 705, H. of C., 19th January, 1965, Col. 62.

[4] Vol. 705, H. of C., 19th January, 1965, Col. 65.

fed, paid, equipped and housed, just like the rest of the forces. Moreover, it has to be transported".[1]

These arguments about the cost of mobility were devastating. As the British economy declined it hardly seemed feasible to make redundant those bases which, over many years, had absorbed so much of the nation's gross national product. Also, according to Labour's Left Wing, fixed bases abroad were largely retained in order to appease the Americans who were in need of partners in strife in the developing world.

Moreover, unlike Mr. Wilson, many Labour ministers remained according to Mr. Richard Crossman, unconvinced that the World Role would survive into the seventies, and these men were strongly critical of the wisdom of building up a new and expensive strategy to fulfil a doomed role. He wrote that at a Cabin et meeting "I then asked about our world-wide role: 'If the Americans like us to have a world-wide role what does this mean for us in terms of military commitments?' Healey replied that what they wanted us to do was not to maintain huge bases but to keep a foothold in Hong Kong, Malaya, the Persian Gulf, to enable us to do things for the alliance which they can't do. They think our forces are much more useful to the alliance outside Europe than in Germany."[1] Mr. Mayhew summed up the Government's position, "I do not want to get into the position of suggesting that bases are cheaper in all circumstancs .... For some purposes it might be cheaper to use the Reserve, for others not. The mix will vary, but as far as I can see there will always be a place for both".[2]

[1] Crossman, Richard. The Diaries of a Cabinet Minister, Vol. I., p.95. Mr. Crossman was, of course, concerned with the utility of bases rather than with their cost.

[2] Vol. 705, H. of C., 19th January, 1965, Col. 66.

This balanced statement would clearly have had a less than enthusiastic emphasis some months earlier.

The Navy Minister also emphasised some of the difficulties inherent in giving up bases. "We have to assess the possible loss of local confidence as a result of our going, the possible uncertainty of the alternative means of reinforcement due to the shortage of overflying rights, difficulty in protecting the point of entry, the problems of acclimatising troops, the time taken and so on".[1] Mr. Mayhew more probably than not had the Malaysian operation in mind when he spoke to the Commons. It was the British operations in Malaysia that finally persuaded the Government that, while a sea and air presence was sufficient for an 'intervention' operation, it was not suitable for the necessarily prolonged handling of an insurgency.

The indispensability of the bases was a compelling reason why the Government found it nearly impossible to make defence savings. The defence review was not entirely successful even at the level of a public relations exercise, for it painfully laid bare, for all to see, the acute weakness of Britain's position. While the jargon of cost control, and of functional costing, value analysis and cost-effectiveness derived from the activities of the Pentagon was novel, these cosmetic terms - an obsession with the costs of feeding alsatian police dogs in Singapore, accommodation for other ranks in Gibraltar and the R.A.F.'s ceremonial dress - seemed the petty concerns of nation in imperial decline. Ironically after centuries of magnificence and splendour, the protection of the realm and its imperial interests had come to depend upon pettyfogging economies that ostentatious displays

[1] Vol. 705 H. of C., 19th January, 1965, Col. 66. Britain was unable to overfly Egypt, Syria or Iraq. Her troops had to go either north via Turkey, Persia and Bahrain or to the south via Libya, the Sudan and Aden. Even the southern corridor became unsuitable because of Sudan's and Libya's opposition.

of Empire, such as ceremonial costume, could cost unless the Ministry of Defence acted decisively to prevent such profligate expenditure.

Despite the difficulty of making defence cuts, the Government's demand for economy remained central to its defence strategy. The Chancellor, in particular, would not be deprived of his pound of flesh, "... I say quite clearly to the Committee that I am by no means satisfied with the amount of cutting that has taken place so far. We are determined to cut it (overseas expenditure). I would say that in some ways it has been allowed to develop into a lush and extravagant growth over the last five or six years. It must be pruned, and pruned back hard".[1] Mr. Callaghan was convinced that Britain could not ".... be expected to go on shouldering the burden she is carrying at the present time",[2] and he promised that "The review is going on and the cuts will and must come, because this is an essential part and an essential way of balancing our overseas payments".[3]

The question of defence expenditure on the British economy, both its general impact and the direct loss of foreign exchange, was also raised by the Chancellor on his visit to Washington in June. Mr. McNamara is reported as having instructed him - "increase productivity at home and make your military establishment more cost-efficient, then I'm sure you could avoid cutting your commitments East of Suez".[4] It was unclear whether Mr. Callaghan flew to London entirely convinced of the merits of the likely impact Pentagon thinking had on the British defence establishment.

[1] Vol. 710, H. of C., 12th April, 1965, Col. 1078.

[2] Vol. 710, H. of C., 12th April, 1965, Col. 1079.

[3] ibid.

[4] Sunday Times, 13th March, 1966, p. 27.

It was, however, not Mr. Callaghan, but curiously enough, Mr. Healey who made the most convincting analysis of the relationship between defence spending and economic weakness - "If our defence spending imposes unacceptable strains on our economy", he said, "then it will weaken and not reinforce our influence in the world. When we decide the size and pattern of our defence, we must watch with extreme vigilance the impact both on our balance of payments, and even more important on our productive resources, particularly in scientists and skilled manpower".[1]

Mr. Healey clearly more than any other post-war Defence Minister was aware of his duties not only to define the country's strategic interests, but also to ensure that it was not expected to carry an over large defence burden. While this showed a robust concern for the 'national interest' in the broad sense, and revealed Mr. Healey as a man concerned with the wider implications of defence, it was arguable, especially in the view of the Chiefs of Staff, whether it was in the best interests of Britain's defence policy. It reflected a built-in conflict of interests in the mind of the Defence Minister - as all subsequent Defence Ministers will confirm - caused by an ever present need to relate his defence programme to a volatile financial situation reflecting a secular economic decline. The balance of payments deficit became the major concern of Mr. Healey and every passing month appeared to undermine his position.

While Labour could not get the savings on the bases that it had expected to realise, and perceived that the new cost-effective methods were difficult to operate, there was one environment in which the Government was justifiably hopeful that savings could be made, and that was in the procurement of aircraft.

[1] Vol. 702, H. of C., 23rd November, 1964, Col. 1028.

As soon as the Labour Party assumed office in October 1964 the question of continuing the TSR-2, P1154 and HS.681 projects were raised. Dismissed contemptuously, as a prestige project in some quarters, it was only with difficulty that breathing space was won for the TSR-2. In February 1965 the Prime Minister told the Commons, "... the original estimate which I can get today for research, design and production is £750 million, which, on an order for 150 would cost £5 million/plane, or 25 times the cost of the Canberra which it was designed to replace.

We have therefore decided, first against the background of our long-term commitments and requirements, that we need to have the immediate evaluation of the future of TSR-2 to which I have referred, which we have not yet got in terms of some of the technical problems I mentioned. Secondly .... we shall have to have fixed prices, guaranteed, with penalty clauses on delivery and the rest if we are not to put the time scale still further back .... We must have that before we can decide ..... Thirdly, we need more information that we have at present about the certainty, capability and cost of certain possible alternatives."[1] The Prime Minister mentioned not only a strict review of the TSR-2 project but also that an alternative, the United States F.111 could be bought instead of the TSR-2.

The various figures given for completing research and development and for producing about 150 aircraft for service have continued to cause considerable confusion. Estimates by the main contractors B.A.C. and B.S.E. of some £400 million seem to conflict with the official figure of £750 million. However, it must be remembered that B.A.C. and B.S.E. did not include in their estimates the

[1] Vol. 705, H. of C., 2nd January, 1965, Col. 934.

expected costs of other work under contract to the Ministry of Aviation. Therefore the official, estimated, total cost of £750 million was not unreasonable. Further, official estimates had to include considerable contingency allowances for the costs that might be incurred during the flight and avionics development programmes. These development programmes were expected to be lengthy and a fully developed TSR-2 was not expected in some quarters to enter the squadron service before 1969. Finally, there was a growing feeling, in official quarters, that the servicing of the TSR-2 might prove a significant long-run cost.[1]

Before considering the actual decision to cancel it should be noted that two complementary lines of thought on TSR-2 existed in the Ministry of Defence. One had accepted the cancellation because of the existence of an alternative aircraft, the F.111; the other considered that there was no longer a requirement for TSR-2 or an alternative type of aircraft. In fact the final decision was very nearly 'TSR-2 or nothing'. The press speculated on this in early April,[2] and speaking on B.B.C. T.V. Mr. Roy Jenkins, the then Minister of Aviation had said, referring to the F.111 "I think there is a good chance we may not need to order it".[3]

It appears that cancellation itself took place before the extensive review called for by Mr. Wilson had actually been completed. The official announcement was made during the course of Mr. Callaghan's Budget Speech, on 5th April, 1965. During the debate that followed, it was recalled that B.A.C. submitted

[1] For a discussion of the methods of estimating the costs of servicing aircraft and how servicibility is assessed see: 'RAF Aircraft Reliability', by Air Cdre. T. Wharton, CBE, in Flight International, 29.2.68, pp.299-302.

[2] See for example reports in Daily Express, 3rd April, 1965 and the Sunday Telegraph, 4th April, 1965.

[3] Reported in Daily Telegraph, 9th April, 1965.

a fixed price contract in January 1965, as demanded by the Prime Minister.

However, they had swiftly withdrawn this offer and replaced it by a target-price contract, under which the Government would have to hear all costs over £9 million above the target price. B.A.C.'s reluctance to quote a fixed price was understandable as much research and development work had still to be done.

Nonetheless, when TSR-2 was cancelled the Government justified the decision mainly because the cost of completing TSR-2 exceeded the cost of purchasing American F.111s. This argument was backed up by reference to American offers of 'offset' deals to help the British Balance of Payments. The *Observer*, commenting on Tory accusations that Labour had given in to U.S. sales pressure, said, "But the facts were that Denis Healey had moved into the Ministry of Defence, where Hardman, Permanent Secretary since 1963, was waiting for him, with clear ideas on cost-effectiveness. These were as effective in killing TSR-2 as Jim Callaghan's insistence on saving money".[1] As Mr. Healey, the Defence Minister, told the Commons, "The fundamental reason for our decision on the TSR-2 was that the cost of the programme we inherited was out of all proportion to the aircraft's military value".[2]

The Government's view on the future size of the aircraft industry and its place in their economic strategy for the country may be seen as forming part of the background to their cancellation decision. In this context the Government had instituted the Plowden Enquiry into the

[1] The Observer, 11th April, 1965.

[2] Vol. 710, H. of C., 14th April, Col. 1190.

Aircraft Industry.[1] The enquiry and the general trend of some of the related public discussions suggested that Britain should not attempt to maintain a full range of aerospace industrial capabilities. In particular, it was suggested that the TSR-2 project was too costly when related to the lack of a large domestic market and export prospects for it.

An example of Plowden period thinking was indeed provided by K. Hartley in an influential article written before the report was published. The general points behind the type of 'thinking' stem from alarm at the rising costs of aircraft production and Britain's comparative lack of opportunity to achieve the economies of long production runs. Setting out the ideal theoretical basis for the aircraft industry Hartley argued that "The view that Britain should abandon military design and development work and concentrate on producing U.S. aircraft under licence must be taken as a serious policy proposal. Ideally, the British and American aircraft industries should specialise in developing and producing those aircraft types, both military and civil, in which each industry has the greatest comparative advantage. Thus, the British industry might specialise in developing and producing those aircraft types, both military and civil, in which each industry has the greatest comparative advantage. Thus, the British industry might specialise in developing and producing medium and short-range civil aircraft, VTOL aircraft and aero-enginines, whilst the U.S. industry might concentrate on building long-range aircraft, space vehicles, helicopters and all varieties of missiles - then each could buy from the specialist producer - and the specialist gain the advantages of large-scale production".[2]

1 Report of the Committee of Enquiry into the Aircraft 1964-65 (Cmnd. 2853, HMSO - cited as 'Plowden Report').

2 Hartley, K. The Future of British Aircraft Industry, The Bankers Magazine, Vol. 199, 1965, p. 335.

Referring to the basic problem of improving the relationship between sales, development and initial production costs Plowden recommended in the event that the U.K. should collaborate on a comprehensive range of military and civil projects with overseas partners; that these projects should be those for which development costs are reasonable in relation to the expected market and that where development costs are disproportionate, for example, on the largest and most complex military aircraft and guided weapons, essential needs should be met by purchase from the U.S.A.[1]

It seems unlikely that TSR-2, having as it did the problems of rising research and development costs, the likelihood of a small production run and uncertainty as to its actual place in a changing strategic environment, had much chance of surviving the economy axe. However, axing the TSR-2, HS.681 and P1154 did not lead to a better future along the lines Plowden recommended. First, Britain did not have any real equal-partnership relation with the American aerospace industry because British industrial capacity (as opposed to technical expertise) was irrelevant to the American industry. Second, collaboration with Europe had not proved that easy. The A.F.V.G. was axed, the M.R.C.A. project had some way to go before it came into full production, and then there was doubt concerning the future of the Anglo-French helicopter projects.

It was fortunate for the Labour Government that the decision to cancel TSR-2 was not complicated by the existence of foreign orders for the aircraft. Had such orders been placed not only would the international political implications of a cancellation have had to be taken into account but also the potential economies of large-scale

[1] Plowden Report, op. cit., p. 38.

production. The latter might have made TSR-2's unit cost more comparable to that of the F.111. However, the only potential customer was the R.A.A.F. France was trying to develop the Mirage range and the U.S.A. had its own designs and rarely bought foreign military aircraft in quantity, preferring to licence-produce instead. An order from the R.A.A.F. would have made delivery of R.A.F. TSR-2's more certain and cancellation much more difficult.

The R.A.A.F. had been involved in planning the requirements for a TSR aircraft since its inception as it was rightly felt that that type of aircraft could perform an important role in the safeguarding of Australian strategic interests.[1] When looking for a new aircraft, during the 1960s, the R.A.A.F. had considered either the Vigilants of Phanton F.4C as its next generation of combat planes. However, the Australian Government told the Air Board to think of a type of aircraft which would not be so soon obsolete. The choice was thus between TSR-2 and TFX. An Australian technical mission under Air Marshal Sir Valston Hancock, Chief of Air Staff, R.A.A.F., went overseas in 1963 to evaluate both aircraft. This mission reported in favour of the TSR-2 to the Australian Government.[2]

The reasons for the Australian official announcement that the mission favoured the F.111 and the subsequent decision to purchase twenty-four F.111s are not clear. One important consideration was probably the growing Australian/United States link in the field of defence equipment. For example, in addition to F.111s the Australians had opted to purchase United States 'Charles F. Adams' missile armed destroyers. As T. B. Millar wrote, 'As far as Australia is concerned we cannot afford to build small quantities of enormously

[1] Daily Telegraph, 4th November, 1963.

[2] Crisis in Procurement, op. cit.

expensive military equipment, and the United States can guarantee to supply in bulk when needed, whereas the United Kingdom cannot. This would seem to have been an important consideration in the decision to purchase the F.111A rather than the TSR-2".[1] Comparative costs may also have played a part, it is possible that the United States offered a more 'cut-price' deal than the United Kingdom could. Mr. Healey, answering criticism that Labour's attitude to the project helped to lose an Australian purchase said, "I have had the advantage of discussing the Australian decision with members of the Australian Government since I have been in office .... they were absolutely certain, when they looked at the comparative cost of the two aircraft, that there was no alternative to them..."[2] But some of the official and unofficial 'anti-TSR-2' lobby may well have added a note of uncertainty as to the project's future which influenced the Australian Government. Finally, Australia's need for a TSR-2 type of aircraft was questioned. It was suggested that the TSR-2 with its nuclear delivery capability was not suited to Australian requirements, as Australia does not possess nuclear weapons.[3] However, in this context, Mr. Charles Gardner, the B.A.C. Publicity Manager, said that in the Australian area the importance of TSR-2 was its ability to survive modern defence systems.[4] Anyway, the F.111 has the capability to carry nuclear weapons and the Australians have never precluded their possession of nuclear weapons.

The 1966 Defence Review (discussed later) envisaged that for at least a decade British forces would remain East of Suez and that the 50 American-supplied F,111s, supplemented by the 'V' bombers,

[1] Millar, T. B., Australia's Defence (Melbourne UP, Australia 1965), p.40

[2] Vol. 710, H. of C., 15th November, 1965, Co. 1194.

[3] The Economist, 2nd November, 1963.

[4] ibid., 23rd November, 1963.

and ultimately to be replaced by the AFVGs, would prove to be, with the use of friendly airfields, a substantial 'presence' and an effective 'deterrent' to untoward or covert aggression. Mr. Healey indicated in the subsequent Commons defence debate that the review was something of a definitive statement. This clearly established that the cancellation of TSR-2 in the previous spring was not the prelude to dramatic changes in defence policy of the kind that eventually occurred. Mr. Healey asserted that 'the major decisions were now taken' and that the review had been 'an exercise in political and military realism'.[1] The Government took the view that Britain was in a position, and would remain in a position, 'to carry out all our treaty commitments, particularly those for NATO, CENTO and SEATO .... We shall be able to carry out a large range of peace-keeping tasks like that in East Africa two years ago, entirely on our own, while maintining a powerful deterrent against intervention by others while carrying them out, and we shall also be able to make a powerful contribution to allied operations if we so decide'.[2] Speculation, however, that the TSR-2 cancellation decision was the thin end of a very substantial wedge about to be driven between Britain's European, and extra-European, commitments did not seriously arise until after the Sterling Crisis of July 1967, the liquidation of the AFVGA project and after France's request to withdraw forces from NATO.

However, 'In-House' debate about the implications of the cancellation of TSR-2 may well have involved assumptions about an early termination of Britain's world role. But this dabate, if it occurred, could only have affected government policy after the Cabinet had decided on a change in policy.

1 Vol. 725, H. of C., 5th March, 1966, Col. 2044-5.

2 ibid.

It would be an error to suppose that the TSR-2 cancellation decision was the occasion for a major change in Britain's strategic perspectives, even though the passing of the resolve to build independently a costly and sophisticated tactical strike reconnaissance aircraft largely, of course, for our own use, did signally mark yet another step towards a significantly diminished military status. It thus appears that in all probability the TSR-2 cancellation decision was not a product of a change in Britain's strategic perspectives but rather one taken purely on the basis of economic and financial factors.

Three issues remained outstanding when TSR-2 was cancelled on 5th April, 1965. First was the question of cancellation costs even though no final figure has ever been given. Second, there was the question of the specially produced tools, jigs and fixtures. These in fact belonged to the Ministry of Technology and BAC was ordered to scrap them. The cost of jigs and tools was £12 million, but their sale value was only £53,000.[1] Also the existing airframe parts, apart from two prototypes and one completed aircraft, had to be cut into very small sections: presumably for security reasons. Finally, on 4th June, 1965, Mr. Roy Jenkins stated, "I have examined very carefully the possibilities of the flying of the TSR-2 during the next few years in aid of our research programme, using the 3 aircraft with engines and the spare parts which are now available. I have regretfully concluded, however, that the information we shall be likely to derive from the flying would be the minimum cost involved in maintaining and operating these complex aircraft.'[2]

[1] Vol. 764, H. of C., 6th May, 1968, Col. 11, oral answers.

[2] Vol. 713, H. of C., 4th June, 1965, Col. 274.

The P1127, the subsonic version of the vertical take off P1154 was, though, to be developed.

The significance of the aircraft cancellations for the East of Suez role soon became apparent because they allowed Labour to make savings which wholly, or in part, might otherwise have been made elsewhere, and of course, they affected Britain's ability to operate in the East of Suez area. And yet in the event it proved that, on balance, Britain's capability to act East of Suez was only marginally impaired by the cancellation. Indeed curiously enough the role might even have benefitted, since the planes ordered by Labour would come into service before those that were cancelled; that is if the new aircraft ever came into service. It was also clear that in one sense the substitution of the F.111A for the TSR-2 was a complement to the East of Suez role, since the aborted British tactical strike aircraft with its residual nuclear capability seemed well suited to central Europe, while the new American aircraft with its enormous ferry range appeared to be a plane specialising in the sort of problems likely to face Britain in the Far East as well as having a residual nuclear strike role which might also prove useful.[1]

However, Mr. Crossman noted what he regarded as the inter-relationship between the TSR-2 cancellation and Britain's role East of Suez. He recorded his impressions of a Cabinet meeting on Thursday February 11th which had been dealing with defence and related both the TSR-2 issue and the imperial role to the Anglo-American alliance: "I am alarmed" he confessed, "at the feeling that we have

[1] Art, Robert, The TFX Decision, McNamara and the Military, 1968, p.19.

put ourselves in the hands of the American politicians - an uneasy feeling which I share with Frank Cousins. Nevertheless, I have to face that in all this Harold Wilson has played the leading role, and that Denis Healey and Roy Jenkins have really only acted as Lieutenants. Harold has shown a solid determination to recreate the Anglo-American axies, the special relationship between Britain and America, very much along Bevinist lines. The more I think of this gamble the more I dislike it. We are cutting back the British aircraft industry in order to concentrate on maintaining our imperial position East of Suez. And we are doing that not because we need these bases ourselves but because the Americans cannot defend the Far East on their own and need us there".[1]

The suspicion that Britain had over-committed herself to the Americans appeared strengthened by the decision to purchase an American replacement aircraft, the F111K, for the now cancelled TSR-2. But an even worse suspicion emerged on the Left of the Party that the F111K had been ordered for a strategic nuclear role.

It was certainly clear that in April 1965 Operational Requirement 343 was still regarded as valid.[2] And insofar as this was so the argument that TSR-2 was cancelled because of its possible strategic nuclear role ignores the capability in this respect of the F-111. Mr. Healey in dealing with the minimum specification for the F111 made it clear that this was so when he asserted that "on the question of the operational requirement for the F111, in all respects it is lower than the requirement for the aircraft ordered for the United States

[1] Crossman, R., Vol. I., op. cit., p.156.

[2] This requirement specified the need for an essentially tactical and reconnaisance aircraft with a sophisticated capability. This gave it a residual strategic role.

Government which gives us a substantial "buffer" in case of any chop in the performance of the American aircraft. In almost every respect - I would not be prepared to hold to every single one: there are many possible parameters - the requirement is substantially the same as for the TSR-2. In all respects the performance of the F-111 is superior to the requirement for the TSR-2." Labour left-wingers were, however, suspicious and when asked by Mr. Michael Foot if the F-111K was required to carry nuclear weapons, Mr. Healey said: "The role of this type of aircraft is as a tactical strike and reconnaissance aircraft, carrying conventional weapons."[1]

That this aircraft had a "strategic bonus" was not admitted officially, but it may be presumed to be correct. However, the case for either the TSR-2 or the F-111K lay in its use over the battlefield to give long-standing cover for troops and/or produce supersonic flight at low level for striking against well-defended targets. This capability was still though necessary in 1965 when the government decided that Britain's role east of Suez took a much higher defence priority than subsequently appeared to be necessary. Even when this role was put in doubt and later abandoned, when first the Carrier and then military commitments were cut back, the justification for replacing the TSR-2 aircraft with the F111K, and later the Anglo-French Variable Geometry Aircraft (AFVG) was that it was of greater value in the European theatre. Subsequent to cancellation, before the adoption of a reason for opting for the F-111K and then AFVG because in his view Operational Requirement 343 had to be met: "the role of this aircraft, as we envisage it, is very much the same as the role of TSR-2 which the previous government planned".[2] He continued: "the central role of this variable geometry aircraft and

[1] Quoted in Williams, Geoffrey, The Strategy of the TSR-2, op. cit., p.740.

[2] ibid.

The F111K ... is to provide this type of intelligence by aerial reconnaisance," referring to the need to have good area cover over a wide distance where reliable information of enemy troop movements needed to be known. Then with a reference to the need for similar cover at sea, he retorted: "a lot of questions have been asked ... about our plans for replacing the capability of strike carriers in the maritime air strike role. The AFVG will do this. To some extent, so will the F111K. The aircraft and the F111K were not intended only for East of Suez commitments ..... The last government planned the TSR-2, which the F111K and AFVG will replace, eventually for a role in Europe....".[1] Though whatever the characteristics the F111K possessed, the development of a variable geometry aircraft with the French, agreed to in December 1966, was complicated by the fact that the French version seemed likely to be a short-range bomber rather than the strike reconnaissance aircraft envisaged by Operational Requirement 343. But eventually the AFVG project was cancelled, too, as was the purchase of the F111K, which signalled an end to the British deployment of a sophsticated tactical aircraft. Today the RAF uses the United States Phantom in both strike and interceptor roles. This aircraft has a capability well below that of the F111K.

What was then the significance of the decision to cancel the TSR-2 in relation to the imperial role? Two conclusions seemed reasonable. First, the coming of the strategic nuclear stalemate between the United States and the Soviet Union had by a process of attrition and technological innovation undermined the relevance of an exclusively independent British nuclear deterrent which, by the time Skybolt was cancelled, had been rendered virtually obsolescent by the solid-fuelled second-strike

[1] ibid., p. 741.

retaliatory systems deployed on both sides of the Iron Curtain. This meant that the development of a sophisticated tactical strike reconnaissance aircraft, capable of a strategic role in dire circumstances, must be related to battlefield activity well below the nuclear threshold. The TSR-2 was more in demand east of Suez than in NATO-Europe where the nuclear threshold was not particularly high; limited operations in Europe below the threshold were therefore definitely circumscribed. This being so, any effort to meet the operational requirements must relate to effective aircraft performance and, of course, rightly or wrongly, Mr. Healey, in the end, preferred the F-111K. It seems reasonable to conclude that the decision to cancel the TSR-2 could later be justified by the fact that its role in Europe was not a critical one as the subsequent cancellation of the F-111L order appears to confirm.

Secondly, the operational requirement for the TSR-2 clearly envisaged a role outside of Europe where a supersonic, low-level strike bomber could give the RAF the general all-round capability inherent in a world role. The political assumption behind this policy was that the world had been made safe by the strategic nuclear deadlock and that as a consequence the main danger to peace lay outside of Europe, in an area where Britain had considerable obligations. Indeed, the subsequent military operations conducted outside Europe by the British may be said to have justified the assumption made that it must continue to possess the capacity to dispose of a rapid provision of force on request which could, and perhaps actually did, prevent small local conflicts from deteriorating into a general war or anarchy. The TSR-2 as a concept was very much the product of 1957 when Britain still stood on the world stage as a great power.

There is perhaps something in the feeling, which was barely articulated, that after the sad Suez affair, Britain needed to be strong enough militarily to deal effectively with the residual problems of its colonial and post-colonial obligations in the face of American hostility. In fact American sympathy for Britain in its period of imperial decline actually increased and the United States discovered that Britain's enlightened colonial policy was not to be confused with the somewhat uncharacteristic reactions to President Nasser's precipitate seizure of the Suez Canal in July 1956.

Britain had sought to meet its considerable colonial responsibilities by the creation of the Strategic Reserve and the organization of the Naval Task Force, which undoubtedly facilitated the discharge of limited operations.[1] And it was with that in mind that the parameters of Operational Requirement 343 were largely fixed. Alliance commitments also played a part in its determination but since the TSR-2 was the next generation of the Canberra type of aircraft, it could be described as CENTO-orientated, as well as suitable for operations in fulfillment of SEATO commitments. As for the grander task of confronting the Soviet Union in NATO-Europe, its low-level characteristics could be useful in fooling the Soviet guided-weapons systems. Given an exclusively European role for Britain there is little doubt that the TSR-2 would be difficult to justify; it is worth reflecting that, given Mr. Healey's view of the local strategy of NATO, in which large-scale military operations were unlikely, his decision to cancel the project seems both logical and inevitable.

Clearly the problem with the TSR-2 was that it was designed in one type of strategic environment but was expected to survive in quite

[1] See Chapter II and Annex A, B and C.

another. But like a giant dinosaur, it became overloaded with equipment which alone could ensure its survival in the age of a sophisticated guided-weapon system. This over-loading made it a costly piece of investment for the British taxpayer whose financial outlay seemed unlikely to bring either commercial or military dividends.

The TSR-2 story is also a classic example of military folly leading to commercial disaster for an industry, if too many of its resources are tied up in one major project. Fortunately, Denis Healey's decision to axe the project in April 1965 helped the British aerospace industry successfully to surmount a crisis. Yet the great tragedy is that a much less ambitious TSR-2 type aircraft might have been commercially viable if the Air staff had had the good sense to order a more modest prototype.[1] Earlier submissions to the general operational requirements indicated the potential existence of a number of realistic projects which might have more satisfactorily met Britain's military requirements in the late 1960s and 1970s.

The essential lesson, however, of the whole affair was that aircraft only make sense today in relation to battlefield requirements and must be ordered for the performance of tactical and not strategic tasks. Had this been realized earlier, the RAF might have found its adjustment to the role of a tactical air force less painful and odious. The TSR-2 was ordered by the RAF (which was reluctantly facing up to the realities of the nuclear-missile age) in the classical tradition of a force that was determined to remain capable of independent operations. That was an illusion.

On the other hand, the Conservatives made the valid point that

[1] The Strategy of the TSR-2, p. 742.

the P1154, the HS681 and the TSR-2 were interdependent, and that if the nation were to continue with the V/STOL force, then her fighting and transport aircraft could then "... be dispersed in penny packets over a number of small strips into which and out of which they can operate".[1]

However, while the Conservatives had perceived a manifest contradiction in the Government's aircraft programme, and while it was especially obvious that on balance those decisions were detrimental to Britain's military capability and also threated the viability of the RAF as a strategic airforce, there can be no doubt that they enormously diminished the pressure on the Government in its persistent search for defence economies.

The savings and hoped for restructuring of the economy that Labour expected to flow from its aircraft decisions, were evidently impressive. The Prime Minister confirmed in the United States that "On present estimates of the cost of the three aircraft we have cancelled, there will be a saving in the next ten years of £1,200,000,000; that is £120,000,000 worth a year of real resources so far as the British industrial production is concerned. This is one of the biggest industrial deployments undertaken in peace-time ... and it is directly designed to assist export industries which at the present time are unable to make their full contribution through a shortage of skilled labour and other resources".[2]

Mr. Healey dealt with a more attractive and in the domestic context more ideological, aspect of the cancellations. He argued that to have accepted the aircraft projects would have entailed

1 The Strategy of the TSR-2, op cit. p. 742.

2 From speech given to the Economic Club of New York, 14th April, 1965.

important sacrifices in the social and economic goals of the government; "... if we had been prepared to accept this bulge in defence expenditure, we would have faced a choice between drastic cuts in the social services or no less drastic cuts in other vital items of military equipment for all three Services throughout this period".[1] This was the kind of speech that the Party's left-wing warmed to, and it made an even bigger impression because it was the Defence Minister's analysis coming into line with what they regarded as the Socialist objectives to which the Party was formally committed.

The approach adopted in a bid to make savings involved another more traditional device which was made clear in the February Defence White Paper which emphasised that the "... steadily increasing economic pressure on the Defence Budget will face Britain ... with the choice between renouncing certain options altogether and increasing still further her reliance on military co-operation with her allies".[2]

This facet of the Government's policy revealed a fetish for an optimism which bordered at times on utopianism. The U.S. could hardly, in view of her growing involvement in Vietnam, give strategic assistance to Britain in Malaya, and this was also manifestly the case in retard to the Australians and New Zealanders, who had no real incentive to spend very much more on defence. Similarly, it was clear that the European nations were no more willing to either take on more of N.A.T.O.s costs or indeed push for European defence integration. The French were growing increasingly disenchanted with the alliance, and although West Germany undertook to purchase more from Britain, the Federal Government continued to place greater emphasis on appeasing

[1] Vol. 710, H. of C., 13th April, 1965, Col. 1191.

[2] The Defence White Paper, February, 1965, p. 6., Cmnd. 2592.

the U.S. over support costs.

While Labour's dream of making savings through greater co-operation with allies had always been a pious hope, the opposite could be said of Labour's aspirations in the nuclear field. It had for Labour been an article of faith that here was an area of Britain's defence policy that offered almost limitless economies. The Labour Government's optimism was ill-founded. But a most remarkable change in attitude was about to occur.

In 1960, Mr. Healey, having made a rapid assessment of the United States' nuclear armoury, asked "Is anybody suggesting that with America already in possession of this type of strategic fighting force there is any need whatever for a contribution in this field from any of her Allies?" Later in the same speech he made this point once more: "... nobody can deny for a moment that the deterrent force of the West is more than adequate for its basic purpose of deterring deliberate aggression against the West. Why on earth are the Government planning to make a contribution to this type of deterrent force? Let us look at the cost of it to Britain".[1] Predictably perhaps, the Labour Manifesto of 1964 had claimed that "The Nassau Agreement to buy Polaris know-how and Polaris missiles from the U.S.A. will add nothing to the deterrent strength of the western alliance".[2]

In the light of these sentiments, the doctrine spelt out in the Defence White Paper, that Britain's proposed contribution under the A.N.F. scheme constituted "... a massive British contribution to the alliance" was really quite extraordinary.[3] Mr. Mayhew heightened

[1] Vol. 627, H. of C., 20th July, 1960, Col. 606,

[2] House of Commons 1964, p. 281.

[3] Defence White Paper, February 1965, p. 8, Cmnd. 2592.

the confusion by designating Britain's nuclear fleet "... a force of tremendous power and significance".[1] The prospective saving from scrapping nuclear weapons thus suddenly evaporated into thin air. On February 15th, the fifth Polaris submarine was cancelled, and a saving of only £45 million, minus cancellation charges, was made. After all Labour's specific commitment to phase-out the deterrent and its bold words about financing a massive conventional force with the money saved on nuclear weapons, this was an almost preposterous outcome.

The dramatic reversal in Labour's nuclear policy was not merely the result of inheriting a Polaris programme far advanced when it gained power, but also perhaps to a sudden fear that British defence policy would look very unimpressive devoid of a nuclear element. Polaris gave that policy some credibility, however flimsy. The overwhelming reason for the change however, was simply that in opposition Labour had fallen for its own rhetoric and exaggerated the savings that could be made from abandoning Polaris.

The inability of the Government to make significant savings through either cuts in the nuclear programme or through greater alliance co-operation was no mere set-back; it was a major reversal, because if savings could not be made in these areas then the Government's endeavours would almost certainly centre on the World Role. Moreover this was not the only threat to the overseas presence - it was being more directly challenged by events in the East of Suez area itself.

Despite Labour's resolve to make defence savings, the Government was unwilling to sacrifice, or even significantly restrict the East of Suez role. It is clear that the hard-pressed Chancellor related the

[1] Vol. 708, H. of C., 11th March, 1965, Col. 663.

cost of the overseas presence to Britain's economic situation on every conceivable occasion, but the Prime Minister was on balance less willing to do so. While supporting the contention that defence costs should be lowered he never escaped the logic of suggesting "... that a start must be made in relation to our very heavy costs in Germany".[1] This pointed to the preference for a extra-European posture; it was clear that a Eurocentric policy was to be denied.

For Harold Wilson, at any rate, the irresistable appeal of the overseas presence did not noticeably decline with the attainment of office. He continued to speak almost passionately about it. It was to him "... a role related to our Commonwealth responsibilities, a role derived from our history and maritime traditions, a role related to the special contribution we can make both within the Commonwealth and our several alliances and in our role of contributing to the peace-keeping work in the U.N."[2] With particular reference to the Far East, the Prime Minister claimed that "... Britain had a very important role to play, not only in the peace-keeping operations there, but also - as in the recent critical situation on the Indo-Pakistan borders - as a mediator to help avoid serious difficulties between Commonwealth countries".[3]

Mr. Wilson gave the singular impression that he also saw the World Role as an essential part of the special relationship and, rather in a parallel way to that which the Conservatives regarded the nuclear deterrent, as a diplomatic device to keep Britain at the high table of international crisis management. Moreover, as the Chinese nuclear

1 Vol. 713, H. of C., 27th May, 1965, Col. 835, Oral answers.

2 Vol. 707, H. of C., 4th March, 1965, Col. 1568-9.

3 Vol. 712, H. of C., 20th May, 1965, Col. 1664. Oral answers.

4 There was, for example, the role played by Britain in the negotiating of the partial nuclear test ban treaty in 1963. See The Permanent Alliance, op. cit., p.224 for an analysis of Britain's failure to have a decisive say in arms-control negotiations.

capabilities increased and as Soviet maritime power grew more intimidating, it was natural for the East of Suez role to gain a greater significance. Indeed, the Prime Minister dramatically warned against the danger of putting "... all our strength into defending our front door while the back door and the kitchen window are left unguarded".[1]

Mr. Healey, nevertheless, also attached important strategic significance to the role and was very concerned about the likely consequences of a British withdrawal from East of Suez. "If we simply abdicated the responsibilities we now carry", he said, "without making any arrangements to share them or to hand them over to anybody, there is a grave risk that some parts of this great area would dissolve into violence and chaos, for we must face the fact that the main danger of war today lies outside Europe and not inside it".[2]

To support this strategic assessment Mr. Healey went on to give the analogy of the East African crisis of 1964, and to reiterate the importance of Britain's action in that situation. Without such prompt and effective action, he argued, East Africa "... might have returned by now to the tragic primeval chaos into which the withdrawal of the U.N. forces plunged much of the Congo".[3] Further evident of the relevance of Britain's East of Suez role, given by Mr. Healey, concerned Malaysia. It was "certain", he said, that if Britain failed to meet her "... treaty obligations to the newly independent Government of Malaysia there would be large scale fighting over much of southern Asia".[4]

[1] Vol. 716, H. of C., 19th July, 1965, Col. 1124.

[2] Vol. 707, H. of C., 3rd March, 1965, Col. 1337.

[3] Vol. 707, H. of C., 3rd March, 1965, Col. 1337.

[4] ibid.

The Defence Minister emphasised the altruistic content of Britain's defence policy. He explained "... that the justification of our military presence East of Suez is not the building of a wall against Communism. Nor is it for the protection of selfish British economic interests. It is essentially the maintenance of peace and stability in parts of the world where the sudden withdrawal of colonial rule has too often left the peoples unable to maintain stability without some sort of external aid".[1]

In view of this analysis the *Economist* some time earlier had reached the conclusion that "Not only is Britain's main defence effort concentrated East of Suez right now; but it is the view of the Minister of Defence and his advisers that it will go on being concentrated there for the next ten or fifteen years".[2]

It was evident that the Defence White Paper indicated a re-emphasis of the East of Suez role with a consequential diminution of the importance of the European role. This was certainly the view of the *Economist* which warned that the Government was in danger of getting "... the balance of Britain's defence effort between Europe and the Indian Ocean area quite seriously out of kilter".[3]

There was a great force in this assessment. As we have seen, even the Government's aircraft cancellations had not significantly damanged Britain's ability to act overseas and even amidst all the talk about urgent defence cuts, the Government restated its intention to build another aircraft carrier which would "... if anything... be slightly bigger than the Ark Royal or Eagle".[4] This seemed to confirm the Navy's East of Suez pre-occupation, a pre-occupation then openly accepted by Mr. Mayhew.

1 Vol. 707, H. of C., 3rd March, 1965, Cols. 1337-8.

2 Vol. 214, Economist, 6th February, 1965, p. 512.

3 Vol. 214, Economist, 27th February, 1965, p. 862.

4 From a speech made by Christopher Mayhew in Newcastle upon Tyne, February, 1965.

C H A P T E R VIII

CAPABILITIES AND COMMITMENTS: THE HISTORIC DILEMMA AND THE AGONIZING RE-APPRAISAL OF POLICY

In 1965 President Sukarno's new year resolution to crush Malaysia, manifested itself in seaborne raids on the Malayan coast and in a menacing Indonesian build up in Borneo and Sumatra. Britain readily responded by sending reinforcements of troops, warships and aircraft into the Far East. During January it was admitted that the 2000 troops of the strategic reserve in the U.K. were to be flown to Malaysia, and over 80 ships had been deployed in Far Eastern waters by the middle of the month. Even the V bombers were on standby to go to the Far East if necessary. During February there were further troop reinforcements from and by the end of the month there were 50,000 troops engaged in Confrontation, the biggest concentration of British troops in the area since Korea. On 14th April, there was even a call up of the Ever Readies to serve in the Middle and Far East.

The Wilson Government thus responded promptly and effectively to the worsening situation in Malaysia. Moreover, it was realised that Britain might be in for a protracted conflict and any optimism that existed towards the end of the year was founded somewhat delicately on Sukarno's kidney complaint, on Indonesia's acute inflation and on the crushing of the 'September movement'.[1]

Moreover, while it was clear that Labour made no determined effort to reduce her commitments East of Suez during 1965, it was incontrovertible that the events of that year were extrememly disagreeable to the Government.

[1] The brutal crushing of the 'September Movement' resulted in massive anti-Communist demonstrations, a deterioration in Sino-Indonesian relations and a weakening in President Sukarno's own position.

The Commonwealth Prime Minister's Conference in June proved a great disaster over Rhodesia but also over Malaysia as well. As Mr. Wilson observes "It was a bitter blow for Tunku Abdul Rahman of Malaysia when the cool reception given to his plea for a combined Commonwealth appeal for an end to Indonesian aggression was followed by a flat refusal to include any reference in the communique other than an agreement to 'take note'."[1] It became increasingly obvious during 1965, that while Britain desired some prestige through her East of Suez presence, she also over-invested a great deal in terms of money, energy, manpower and anxiety, in continuing that presence. Moreover, the commitment to Indonesia could escalate to the point of a general war, but even if this did not occur Britain would still remain over-stretched. Not only was Britain engaged in Confrontation with Indonesia, but she was well and truly landed on the Aden hook. Labour's inherited responsibilities were not inconsiderable and constituted a constraint on the options available to the government. On 1st September terrorists in Aden murdered Sir Arthur Charles, Speaker of the Legislative Council.

On 25th September the Aden constitution was suspended with the reports of street assassinations and of British servicement being shot at from roof tops by Arab snipers. Two days before the Labour Party Conference "Aden was aflame".[2] Fears of another Cyprus were expressed at Blackpool and increasingly there were indications that the Government was divided over whether Britain should remain in Aden for very much longer. It was clear for instance that the Colonial Secretary, Mr. Greenwood was keen "to call it a day". But he tried to delay a tough British response just prior to the National Executive elections which could damage his image

[1] Wilson, Harold. op. cit., p.180.

[2] Wilson, op. cit., p.186.

as a stalwart of the Left.[1]

A majority in the Government, however, continued to see Aden as a valuable link with the East and according to the *New Statesman*, Mr. Greenwood ".... came under heavy fire from the Chiefs of Staff, backed by Denis Healey".[2] It went on to say that "... the brass hats insisted that Britain must maintain an exclusive sovereign base in Aden", and that "the Prime Minister had no hesitation in siding with the brass hats (supported of course by the Foreign Office representative Michael Stewart)".[3] Richard Crossman confirms that the chiefs of staff proved formidable opponents of a radical re-think in policy. He recorded in his diary that "as we have looked at each of our overseas commitments - at Hong Kong, at Malaya, at the Maldive Islands, the Persian Gulf and Aden - the Defence Ministers have been overwhelmed by the advice of their experts, who say 'Oh, Minister, you can't cut that.' As a result we are moving up to the period of the Defence Estimates without any serious cut being carried through by Denis Healey and his staff. Indeed, it now looks as though in 1964 Harold Wilson was responsible for an over-commitment in overseas expenditure almost as burdensome - if not more burdensome - than that to which Ernest Bevin committed us in 1945, and for the same reason: because of our belief that it is only through the existence of this relationship that we can survive outside Europe".[4]

Nevertheless, despite the Government's hope of retaining the Aden base, it was obviously agitated about its capacity to do so, and

1 Crossman, op. cit., p. 334.

2 Johnson, P., New Statesman, Vol. 70, 8th October, 1965, p. 516.

3 ibid.

4 Crossman, op. cit., p. 117.

indeed about the need of doing so, if Aden's internal situation deteriorated. It was therefore imperative for Labour to look around for an alternative to the Aden base. Mr. Greenwood announced on 10th November, that the Government had decided to set up a new colony - the British Indian Ocean Territory - to provide defence facilities for British and U.S. forces. The colony would consist of Chagos Archipelago, Aldabra, Farquhar and Desroches.

There was also very definite and growing signs that the Government were contemplating the idea of an Australian base and was also bent upon acquiring an American aircraft carrier. Indeed, Mr. Healey confirmed that Britain had approached the U.S. about an aircraft carrier, "We have been on consultations with the American Government to the extent necessary to enable us to clear our own minds about what would be involved in terms of cost, peformance, and so on".[1] It was becoming evident therefore that even if Britain were expelled from Aden, and eventually Singapore, it did not necessarily mean the end of the East of Suez role. The Labour Government was emphatically determined to continue with an overseas presence, even, if necessary, without the traditional imperial base structure.

The need for an alternative to the Aden Base was, of course, a direct result of events in Aden, but there also existed a more considered reason for downgrading the value of the Persian Gulf role. Indeed, on television, in 1970, Mr. Healey admitted that "I always .... thought ... that it was a mistake to stay as long in the Gulf as we planned to. I didn't think the advantages were worth the risk". The opposite was true of the Far Eastern role. "I would have liked to stay longer than in

[1] Vol. 718, H. of C., 3rd November, 1965, Col. 1018.

fact in the end we had to go", said the Defence Minister.[1]

Even in 1965 it was manifest that the Government regarded Britain's presence in the Persian Gulf to be of less strategic importance than her presence in South East Asia: there was far greater anxiety about Peking than with Cairo. The plight of India, then regarded as the world's greatest democracy, had a far greater romantic appeal than the fate of Aden,and this became even more acute as China's belligerance towards India grew. The Prime Minister however, continued to believe that the defence of India was a unique British responsibility. Indeed, the New Statesman announced that Mr. Wilson "... now proposes to deploy East of Suez the Polaris Submarines he once ridiculed".[2]

In addition, whilst the traditional and well-established arguments about the protection of oil interests in the Persian Gulf did not go unheeded, they were very clearly given a lower priority than under the Conservatives. While the Government was fully conscious that the Gulf provided one half of Britain's demand for crude oil and oil products, and that Britain had an enormous direct capital investment in the production of oil, it was suspicious of the argument that a British presence in the Gulf seriously diminished the threat from the manifold calamities that could befall her oil interests in that area.[3] It also seemed probable that a political and military balance might emerge in the Persian Gulf, since there was no single preponderant power as there was in South East Asia. Nasser's failure in the Yemen confirmed this analysis and gave some credibility to the calculation that Saudi Arabia could act

[1] Twenty Four Hours (a B.B.C. television programme), 5th March, 1970.

[2] New Statesman, Vol. 70, 24th December, 1965, p. 989.

[3] The Permanent Alliance, op. cit.

as a counter-balance to the United Arab Republic. Indeed a settlement between Saudi Arabia and the U.A.R. over Yemen, was reached in August. There was an immediate cease fire and the U.A.R. agreed to withdraw all forces by September 1966.

The dramatic events in Aden and the Yemen also had the effect of increasing the concern about whether, in certain circumstances, a British presence heightened rather than deterred violence, and whether a balance might emerge if Britain withdrew. This was not to contend that these reservations were strongly advocated, let alone well articulated, but only that there existed less ideological attraction for the overall strategic and political relevance of the Persian Gulf role. Labour was undergoing its first experience of the great turbulence and cost associated with retaining a Middle Eastern presence. Britain's Persian Gulf allies could indeed be threatened because as Mr. Brown was later to admit that "Though our military protection might help them, our treaty and military position also attracted attack to them".[1]

Moreover, it was not only the Persian Gulf situation that was growing daily more menacing. In addition to the violent upheavals in Aden, there was the impending secession of Singapore from the Malaysian Federation. Labour was thus simultaneously faced with the seeming impossibility of creating a Federation in Southern Arabia and with the final breakdown of a British inspired Federation in Malaysia. Even more ironical was the Cabinet's fear that while Britain was at some risk protecting the Malaysian Federation from external threats, the members themselves were foolishly subverting it from within. Mr. Wilson later wrote

[1] Vol. 748, H. of C., 19th June, 1967, Col. 1129.

of this episode as one of 'great anxiety' for the Labour Government. He described the events running up to the break up as constituting "a possible coup against Harry Lee".Then "on the weekend of the 13-15 August news came through that the Federation had broken up. There had been angry scenes between the Tunku and Lee. This had led to Singapore being virtually expelled from the Federation and told to set up on its own account. Lee was in a desperate state, bursting into tears in front of the television cameras and regretting the break-up. Nevertheless, he determined to make a go of the newly-independent Singapore".[1]

There was also the mounting fear that the disintegration of the Federation could create new strategic problems. Clearly Lee Kwan Yew's policy of non-alignment was now compatible with a strong anti-American position & even bitter criticism of the British. He affirmed that he was "not keen about Britain's power position"[2], and also that he would not allow Britain to use the Singapore base for any military action that was not directly concerned with the defence of Malaysia and Singapore.

Mr. Healey made the comment some years later that he was "... very tempted when, in the middle of Confrontation - in the summer of 1965 - the Tunku and Harry Lee gave us an opportunity of getting out, by breaking their own Federation behind our backs. But you just couldn't do it".[3] And so it was that even after the breakdown of the Malaysian Federation, Britain still remained committed to defend Singapore.

In May the Prime Minister had indicated that he had no plans "... for changes in the near future in the long term commitments East of Suez"[4], and this was still the Government's position at the end of

[1] Harold Wilson, pp. 176-177.

[2] Press Conference, Singapore, 13th August, 1965.

[3] The Policies of Power, op. cit. p.

[4] Vol. 713, H. of C., 25th May, 1965, Col. 234, Oral answers.

the year. While the crises East of Suez weakened Labour's enthusiasm for the East of Suez role, those same crises made it very difficult if not unthinkable that Britain could renounce over-night its overseas obligations, even if it wanted to.

Also, of some historical significance was the fact that British strategists had for some years seen the East of Suez role as a coherent whole. This was not the case with Mr. Healey, but on the whole the Persian Gulf and Far Eastern roles were regarded as interdependent by successive Cabinets. Indeed, the Prime Minister rather brusquely dismissed any argument that Britain's Middle Eastern role could be divorced from her Far Eastern one, "The Middle East is obviously important not only as a base for that area but as a staging post for dealing with our obligations further east".[1] The influence of this school of thought was not inconsiderable: it certainly contributed to the prolongation of the Middle Eastern role long after the level of disillusionment seemed to indicate a withdrawal.

The Government's acceptance of the East of Suez presence during 1965 was therefore complex but the comparative silence of the Parliamentary Left to the Cabinet's policy is nonetheless remarkable. Even Mr. Paget, whose sympathies lay to the right of his party, found the Defence White Paper too cautious by half, claiming that "... it is almost exactly what I would have expected the Right Hon. Gentleman opposite to have proposed.... I am still waiting for some explanation why the Labour Party's defence policy, which we worked out over a number of years together, has been abandoned, and the Conservative policy adopted in its stead".[2] Mr. Paget found support. The *New Statesman* also sadly

[1] Vol. 713, H. of C., 25th May, 1965, Col. 236.

[2] Vol. 707, H. of C., 3rd March, 1965, Col. 1367.

commented that "... in the field of defence and foreign affairs Mr. Wilson and his colleagues have shown a marked antipathy to the language of idealism - which they spoke so freely in opposition - and a positive relish for the art of realpolitik".[1] Indeed, the art of the real-politik had long been practiced by successive Labour Cabinets since the war and was not entirely absent either from the Labour Governments of the inter-war period. Socialist ideology was a recessive factor when counter-balanced by considerations of power.

Be that as it may, the silence of the Left was indeed rather surprising. However, the Marxist analyst, Dr. Ralph Milliband suggested that the Left in 1965 did not feel betrayed, because it had never believed that Mr. Wilson would pursue a Socialist foreign policy. "... There is no point", he said, "in anyone on the Left thinking that Mr. Wilson has sneaking 'neutralist' or un-Atlantic sympathies: he has never given any sign of it".[2] "In fact, Dr. Milliband argued, "it would be very remarkable indeed if the Government's performance was not marked by orthodoxy, given the programme on which the Labour Party fought in the 1964 election, its slender victory, the political and economic situation it faced when it assumed office, the known tendencies of its most senior members and the conservative pressure to which it is subjected".[3] The Left thus consoled itself with the thought that "... in relation to home affairs at least, the Government's performance could have been worse".[4] Though not much.

It must also have been aware that if it brought the downfall of the Government it would be responsible for the return of a Conservative

[1] New Statesman, Vol. 69, 19th March, 1965, p. 425.

[2] The Socialist Register, January, 1965, p. 190.

[3] The Socialist Register, January, 1965, p. 185.

[4] The Socialist Register, January, 1965, p. 186.

Administration, and if it undermined Mr. Wilson's position within the Party it would in all probability get a more right-wing leader - perhaps indeed Mr. Roy Jenkins. In consequence the Left contended itself with the contrived concessions offered from time to time, such as the projected Commonwealth mission to those countries involved in the Vietnam war, Harold Davies' abortive trip to Hanoi and Patrick Gordon Walker's equally well-publicised pilgrimage to South East Asia.[1]

Moreover, even when the Parliamentary Left felt alienated its protests were negatory because of a lack of coherence and of power. The Prime Minister had skillfully ensconced the more prominent left-wingers in the corridors into the Cabinet, and this manoeuvre, apart from having the obvious advantage of silencing the more articulate of the Left, also strengthened the residual belief that Harold Wilson was as socialist as any candidate that the Left could actually hope might emerge as a Party leader and Prime Minister. Only Mr. Cousins remained petulantly uneasy and he was a residual member of the utopian Left which could offer no real socialist alternative, except that of neutralism and great power impotence. Mr. Wilson faced no real challenge.

This was not to say that the Left was totally inarticulate over foreign and defence matters or that its influence could be ignored. The P.L.P., in fact, passed a motion on 2nd August, 1965, which said "That this meeting of the P.L.P. notes with approval the cancellation of the TSR-2 contract and savings on the TA, but believes that no solution of the country's economic problems is possible unless drastic cuts in arms expenditure are made much earlier than at present proposed."[2]

[1] Mr. Wilson sent Davies to Hanoi because he had "written extensively about Ho Chi-Minh, whom he knew well". See The Labour Government, op. cit., p. 167.

[2] The Times, 3rd August, 1965.

This motion, though, was duly disregarded by the leadership. It would be wrong to deduce from the absence of substantial overt pressure, over East of Suez, from the Left - and indeed from trade unions, industry and the Parliamentary Labour Party itself - that the view of these power elites were unimportant or simply ignored. The relative calm, in fact, was expression of the widespread belief that the Government was doing as much as could be reasonably expected in cutting defence costs. The Government could only sustain this favourable impression by making cuts its principal priority and this is exactly what it did. As a result, even when the Left criticised the Government's handling of foreign affairs it was not actually over the East of Suez role or even, apart from Rhodesia, directly over British action overseas. It was almost without exception over the Government's declaratory support of American action in Vietnam and the Dominican Republic. The American bombing of North Vietnam, of course, started in February and the Dominican crises in early April.

The pattern of left-wing activity then was becoming clear. It was limited to either domestic issues - to the inevitable ritual of steel nationalisation and the emotionally charged disputes over immigration and the incomes policy - or to the more dramatic and ideologically contentious areas of foreign policy such as Vietnam and Rhodesia.

The East of Suez role, thus, for the time being was safe. It was unlikely that the crises in the area would provoke sufficient stress in the decision-making processes of the British government to bring about a hasty withdrawal. Moreover, the role seemed invulnerable from both the consequences of defence savings and intra-Party criticism

However, the continuation of the overseas role, in a curious way, depended on the persistent downgrading of the European posture: the possibility of a resurgent continental strategy remained a potentially serious threat to the World Role.

Of the United Kingdom's main defence roles under Labour, it was the European one which inspired the least political approbation. Moreover the approbation it did attract was on balance unfavourable. Whereas prior to the election, Labour had proposed an increase in Britain's conventional commitment to the continent, during 1965, troops were, in fact, withdrawn from Europe. As they were taken to the Far East, SHAPE began to fear that B.A.O.R. was little more than a back-up for East of Suez.[1] Indeed, during 1965, the force level in Germany stood at 51,000 which was 4,000 below the committed level. N.A.T.O. grew concerned lest the stability of Europe was threatened by such troop withdrawals.

The chances of more withdrawal, moreover, seemed likely if the British Government could not get the Germans to pay a greater share of the upkeep of the Rhine Army. The total cost of B.A.O.R. was £200 million of which £85 million was in fact foreign exchange. The two year agreement with the Germans on support costs had expired on 31st March 1964. A new one had been signed on the 27 July 1964, but Bonn did not commit itself to a figure. It simply promised "to do what it could". In the event it "could only do" £25-30 million annually.[2] However, Sir ~~Godfrey~~ Geoffrey de Freitas, the Chairman of the P.L.P. defence committee, told a Western European Union Conference in Paris that

[1] The author discovered that many senior officials in BAOR regarded themselves as constituting an unofficial strategic reserve for the East of Suez role. This was made plain during a visit to the Higher Education Centre, Dortmund, where I had organised a strategic studies seminar for Southampton University in October 1965.

[2] The Policies of Power, op. cit. p. 219.

"... if the Rhine Army were reduced this would be only for economic reasons, or to provide troops for the Far East, and not for lack of interest in Europe".[1] This was not entirely convincing and was predictably seen as further evidence of Labour's myopic attitude to European politics.

Mr. Healey was even more blunt than his back-bench colleagues. "I think that, with the best will in the world, it will be difficult to persuade the average Englishman to carry the economic burden of maintaining the present level of forces in Germany ..."[2] Mr. Wilson also took a tough line. He told N.A.T.O.s foreign ministers in London in May, "I want my colleagues to realise that we cannot and do not intend to continue to take this unfair share of the economic burden. Important bilateral negotiations are going on in an atmosphere of great goodwill. But should they not succeed in their agreed objective, Her Majesty's Government will be forced to consider, jointly without allies, whatever action is necessary, however unpalatable to reduce this drain upon our foreign exchange resources".[3]

Nor was there any reluctance to contemplate extreme solutions, and as a notable contribution to alliance cohesion and goodwill the New Statesman suggested that if Britain and Germany could not agree on an offset agreement "... then Britain should forthwith notify its allies that it proposes to withdraw troops from Germany at the rate, say, of 1000 a month ..."[4] In the event, though, such extreme and perhaps even provocative action proved unnecessary. The preliminary talks

1 Reported Economist, Vol. 214, 13th March, 1965, p. 1114.

2 Vol. 707, H. of C., 3rd March, 1965, Col. 1336.

3 Harold Wilson, from a speech at a NATO Ministerial Council meeting in London on 11th May, 1965.

4 New Statesman, Vol. 69, 14th May, 1965, p. 749.

between Mr. Wilson and Dr. Erhard led to further talks between Britain and West Germany and a settlement was reached towards the end of June. The Germans agreed that the offset should total £117,000,000 during the first two years up to 31st March 1966 and a further £54,000,000 during the third years. This was a good settlement for the British Government, but it nevertheless only reinforced the agreement that had been in operation between 1962 and 1964.

The agreement itself was important not only because of the economic benefit that Britain derived, but also because ot was achieved as a result of some exceedingly tough bargaining by the Labour Government. This was particularly significant since the Government's unbending attitude to the Rhine Army question would hardly have appeared credible, or even comprehensible, let alone moral, if Labour had still pretended that a build up of conventional forces in Europe was the over-riding defence aim of the United Kingdom.

From the Government's statements and decisions it was plain that this was no longer the case. The arguments in favour of a conventional build-up in Europe were now ignored or even repudiated. The Prime Minister put forward the view "... that the best deterrent is the conviction on the part of any potential aggressor that any form of calculated aggression entails unacceptable risks of escalation to all-out war".[1] Denis Healey robustly propounded a similar view at the meeting of N.A.T.O. Defence Ministers in Paris 31st May - 1st June. He suggested that "... if the overwhelming U.S. nuclear strength should fail to deter aggression against Western Europe, it is impossible to conceive of a long land campaign and it is therefore no longer necessary

[1] Vol. 707, H. of C., 4th March, 1965, Col. 1563.

to plan for a conflict of up to 90 days as hitherto assumed under the hypothesis to which N.A.T.O. had worked for the past ten years".[1] Large numbers of reserves were therefore irrelevant, and what mattered was the number of troops actually deployed before hostilities began. The size of Rhine army was therefore of secondary importance.

The Defence White Paper also reiterated this logic. Not only was a 'prolonged war', after a nuclear exchange, ruled out, but so was a 'prolonged war' prior to a nuclear exchange. The Government seemed determined to disavow all Labour's previously stated principles on nulcear weapons. It was now asserting that conventional forces were only needed "... to deter miscalculated incursions and to suppress any ambiguous and unpremediated local conflicts..."[2] Rarely can such a fundamental tenet of Labour's strategic analysis, as the paramouncy of a conventional force capability in Europe, have been so coolly dispatched into the oblivion of electoral promises now to be dishonoured in power.

It was clear that Labour's first objective was not to increase the capacity for a more flexible conventional response to aggression but to make defence savings through a limitation of options at the conventional level rather in the hitherto much reviled Sandys' tradition. Mr. Healey was beginning to generate unparalleled optimism in regard to the European situation. "... we can surely dismiss from our military calculations the idea of an all-out premeditated attack and concentrate instead on organising the forces capable of deterring the kind of attack which might conceivably arise either through pure accident or through political or military misunderstandings, in other words a war by mistake".[3]

[1] Keesings, 19th - 26th June, 1965, p. 20809.

[2] Defence White Paper, February 1965, Cmnd. 2592, p.8.

[3] Vol. 707, H. of C., 3rd March, 1965, Col. 1333.

According to Mr. Healey, "This is the only real problem we face in Europe at present..."[1]

There was, of course, an element of fait accompli in Mr. Healey's analysis. The Indonesian Confrontation made the abandonment of Labour's traditional European policy inevitable if not desirable and anyway Mr. Healey was only projecting a European defence doctrine that had existed ever since N.A.T.O.s inception. The certainty was that Mr. Healey's analysis appeared incontrovertible. He had long believed in it and constantly reiterated the Healey theorem: "nearly all the strategic problems of the alliance are due to the fact that it takes five per cent probability of massive retaliation to deter the Soviet attack; but none of America's allies would ever be happy in a situation in which there is a 95 per cent possibility that the Americans won't respond".[2]

It was perhaps the inevitability of the collapse of Labour's European policy that explains the extraordinary manner in which the Party accepted the reversal in policy. Certainly, Labour's leadership was aware that the only way a conventional bias could be attained was by abandoning the World Role; although it was possible to build up conventional forces by increasing the defence Budget or by re-introducing conscription. In the light of such alternatives, it was not so surprising that the Party accepted with alacrity Mr. Healey's analysis. This attitude was of considerable importance for the East of Suez role, since it encouraged the continued diminution of B.A.O.R. in order to reinforce the overseas presence.

[1] ibid.

[2] Denis Healey's Lecture on February 11th, 1961, to the University of California. Text supplied to author by Mr. Healey.

The evolution of Labour's defence priorities, the inter-relation between them and the measures adopted to secure them, by the very nature carried seeds hostile to the World Role during 1965. The most critical priority was the Government's pledge to introduce savings, but several other perspectives appeared during the year. There was the exacting nature of the role itself, there were significant indications of growing concern in the Party and finally there was the manifest impossibility of any further reductions of the European obligation in order to sustain the overseas commitment. In four areas of policy - the need for defence economies, the exigencies of the Imperial Role, party pressures and the growing requirements of European defence - revealed contradictions in the East of Suez role which could not be overcome within the framework of Labour's defence policy.

However, the role remained more or less what it had been at the outset. This was directly attributable to the growing crisis that engulfed the East of Suez area. The events in Aden, Malaysia, India and China ensured that Britain was enmeshed whether she liked it or not. But in Europe a period of detente since late 1961 had encouraged increasing optimism that the military stalemate had induced a political one as well. By 1965 the detente was only just beginning to reveal some of its own problems, problems which were later to direct anxieties once more to the strategic problems of the continent.

During 1965, Labour had sought to contrive a course whereby savings could be achieved without either rendering the East of Suez role incredible or destroying stability in Europe. In this endeavour

it was remarkably successful. None of the savings it decided to make were likely to erode significantly the overseas presence. It did not drastically cut down or eliminate the bases, although this at one time seemed likely; nor did it reduce Britain's commitments overseas. Instead the Government had taken measures that entailed significant savings while only marginally weakening Britain's ability to act.

However, while the East of Suez role looked in fact secure in the short term there were definite signs that the role was facing re-appraisal. Although Mr. Mayhew promised "... the greatest possible economy in our spending and the greatest possible fighting effectiveness for our forces",[1] but it was now reasonable to ask whether these objectives were compataible and which had priority. This question was now being posed because indeed, the Government's avowed objectives, to cut defence spending to £2000 million, to continue both European and World Roles, and to reduce if not eliminate overstretch, were by the end of the year absurdly irreconcilable. No longer could the Government take measures to achieve any one of these objectives, without undermining at least one of the other two. The moment was rapidly approaching when it would be imperative to choose between, as opposed to trying to reconcile, defence goals. The pace of events appeared to quicken.

On 5th August, Mr. Healey gave a progress report to the House on the Government's defence review. In it he revealed the extent of the savings that had so far been achieved. With some sense of achievement the Defence Minister informed the House that the Government "... had managed to reduce the forecast figure to £2,180 million".[2] This was

[1] Vol. 705, H. of C., 19th January, 1965, Col. 70.

[2] Vol. 707, H. of C., 5th August, 1965, Col. 1882.

a substantial achievement and meant that the Government was more than half way towards its target of £2000 million.[1] The defence review therefore had sought out and subsequently eliminated a good deal of waste in Britain's defences.

Mr. Healey's claim that Britain's capability had been increased 'very substantially', was more difficult to sustain.

However, the Government had only reached the half way point in its defence cuts and additional cut-backs could begin to weaken the East of Suez presence. While the *Economist* conceded that half the cuts proposed by the defence review could be made from trimming "excess fat", with persistent logic it went on to ask "... where is the other half coming from".[2]

Even amidst the remarkable euphoria which accompanied the Defence Minister's progress report, Mr. Healey still felt constrained to sound a warning note. ".... I readily confess", he said "that to bridge the remaining nearly £200 million gap to the target,will require re-deployment of our forces and a smaller total of manpower in the Services".[3] And then in a remark which carried pregnant implications for the East of Suez role the Defence Minister argued "... that reductions in overseas exchange expenditure must depend on withdrawing individuals from service overseas. There is no other way of achieving them ...[4] These statements obviously indicated that in the future the ongoing review might indeed impose a very severe constraint on the World Role.

The growing uncertainty which surrounded the East of Suez Role increased because no one knew for how much longer the Government would

[1] Vol. 717, H. of C., 5th August, 1965, Col. 1882.

[2] Economist, Vol. 216, 17th July, 1965, p. 216.

[3] Vol. 717, H. of C., 5th August, 1965, Col. 1885.

[4] ibid.

continue to support it without impairing the European commitment. Mr. Healey had no doubt about the inter-relationship between the two when he conceded that, while the Government intended to bring B.A.O.R. up to 55,000 this depended "... on our other overseas commitments.."[1]

Moreover, Labour could not assume that the demands of the European role would remain for the rest of the decade at the same level as they had done in 1965. What would happen if the detente in Europe collapsed, if there were trouble in Eastern Europe or if the United States felt she had to withdraw large numbers of troops from Western Europe in order to sustain the Vietnam war? These questions were as critical for the East of Suez role as the questions about what would happen if Confrontation escalated or if the situation in Southern Arabia suddenly got out of control. The central question therefore obdurately remained - could Britain cover the full range of its commitments on a defence budget of £2000 million, and if not, which commitments should be sacrificed?

Of course, senior Ministers felt obliged to defend the Government's plan for a defence ceiling. The ceiling was at first provisional, but it soon became inflexible and unyielding. Mr. Healey believed that it would "... enable us to get the right balance between our defence needs and what the nation can afford",[2] and the Foreign Secretary pointed out that "it would be quite useless to make a list of foreign policy objectives, then to say that it resulted in a certain defence policy and then to find that we could not meet that defence bill without serious damage to our economy".[3]

[1] Vol. 720, H. of C., 17th November, 1965, Co. 73, Written answers.

[2] Vol. 716, H. of C., 21st July, 1965, Col. 214, Written answers.

[3] Vol. 716, H. of C., 20th July, 1965, Col. 1367.

There was overwhelming validity in this thesis, for not even a superpower could afford to protect all its interests regardless of their importance. Clearly, Governments have to distinguish between interests that are vital and those which are not.

But the Government continued to act almost as if no financial ceiling existed. The Government failed to acknowledge that the decision in favour of a defence ceiling was likely to affect the whole spectrum of foreign and defence policy. As a result the decisions of 1965 were taken within the constraints of a foreign policy that had been circumscribed by the imposition of a ceiling in late 1964.

The Review started from the position that considerable defence savings must be made; it then produced an arbitrary figure of £2000 million, above which the defence budget should not rise, and finally it deduced, in view of the previous objectives, that commitments should be cut. The review therefore was based on an assumption which circumscribed its outcome.

The obvious fact shortly emerged that Mr. Healey's defence review was seriously affected by Mr. George Brown's national plan. It was Healey's aspiration to contrive a defence policy responsive to the economic situation, but it became completely dominated by Britain's secular economic decline.

Nevertheless, in spite of the growing pressure on Mr. Healey to reduce defence costs, even by the end of 1965 it was still obscure as to which commitments, if any, were to be reduced. Although the Defence White Paper took up the issue of the need to line-up commitments with manpower and resources, it conspicuously failed to say how this

was to be done. Indeed, one of the fundamental flaws inherent in the defence review during 1965 was its almost reckless disregard for the need to cut commitments. This attitude remains almost inexplicable. However, the obvious indecision and procrastination over commitments during 1965 was such, that even the most patient and loyal of M.P.s were showing signs of rebellion as Summer passed into Autumn.

It soon became clear that the Foreign Office was clearly to blame because it was reluctant to re-consider commitments until Denis Healey had exhausted all ways and means of making savings in the defence budget. In fact, Denis Healey later conceded that this was a serious weakness in the whole Government's strategy. "The Foreign Office", he said,"wouldn't agree to look at commitment until we saw how far we could go by cutting expenditure on equipment". "We are very much overstretched" he added, "but unfortunately the Foreign Office hadn't established any priorities itself in relation to the costs of policies.".[1] The real failure however was that of the Cabinet as a whole.

By the end of 1965 the Defence Minister rather wistfully observed that "The question is not a reduction of garrisons or the closing of bases but the military tasks which the nation is called on to perform".[2] The Prime Minsiter also recognised that the defence review, if it were to reduce expenditure to £2000 million, must now look at commitments. "It is a question of cutting commitments to a point we can fulfil..." said Mr. Wilson - and then came the crucial qualification - "... the commitments are highly competitive with one another".[3] The cruel dilemma confronting the Cabinet was clearly that the defence review

[1] The Policies of Power, op. cit. p. 187

[2] Vol. 721, H. of C., 24th November, 1965, Col. 493, Oral answers.

[3] Vol. 707, H. of C., 3rd March, 1965, Vol. 1357.

could not ever hope to reach its target if it failed to reduce commitments, but even if it cut commitment the Government might have to sacrifice objectives as set out in the ambitious defence programme and which it valued so highly.

Mr. Thorneycroft for the Opposition was anxious to expose this dilemma. In a trenchant reference to Labour's claims that Britain's forces were overstretched he rather shrilly enquired, "If they are overstretched, what should we do? We must either reduce the roles or increase the numbers, but one reads in vain through the White Paper to find the slightest indication of either course".[1] Mr. Thorneycroft gloomily predicted the consequence of the Government's hope of getting defence on the cheap. "If, therefore, the roles are maintained" he said "while costs rise .... the result is that someone will suffer, and that someone will be the British serviceman".[2] The logic of this criticism was now clear. In fact, the Government did not reveal the slightest readiness to cut commitments. There was no influential ex-service element in the Party to argue against such cuts, as there was in the Conservative Party. Indeed the cuts were acceptable to the Left and trade union leaders, and there was the time hallowed expedient for Labour, as a new Government, to make changes, since it could claim that the desperate situation left by the outgoing Government made them inevitable.

There were, however, many factors militating against a radical defence review. Among the most salient was the influence of Patrick Gordon Walker and then Michael Stewart as foreign secretary.

1 Vol. 707, H. of C., 3rd March, 1965.

2 Vol. 707, H. of C., 3rd March, 1965, Col. 1358.

These orthodox politicians reinforced continuity in British foreign policy. So did the Government's understandable but overwhelming concentration on domestic politics. There was the tedious process of passing legislation on a small majority. There were the vagaries of the year's by-election and the failure of the electorate to allow the Government to get Patrick Gordon Walker into the Commons.

The final, and certainly most important, factor favouring the cautiousness of the defence review was that, at this time, Britain was deeply involved in military operations. The constraints this imposed was later admitted by Mr. Healey. In a television interview he said that it was patently absurd to suppose "... that a Government in the middle of a war can think realistically about the post-war situation. When we got into power in 1964 we had been landed in a major war in the East in confrontation which was tying up 55,000 men in the jungle. We had a minor war in the Middle East, in South Arabia, which was involving I think, at the time, some 10-15,000 men. And you cannot realistically think about the post-war situation when that is going on".[1]

The tenour of the defence review during 1965 was inevitably favourable to the World Role since it left the East of Suez commitment intact. However in another sense, it was counter-productive because, by failing to remove the contradictions in Labour's defence policy, it also failed to produce a policy which could effectively sustain the World Role over the years that lay ahead. The weakness of the Government's unfolding defence policy was that it was neither based on a detailed analysis of what had to be done to defend Britain's

[1] Twenty Four Hours (A B.B.C. Television programme) 5th March, 1970. It is not clear from Mr. Healey's remarks why a government cannot foresee the consequences of a "post-war situation". Indeed in 1941 with the German armies at the Gates of Moscow Joseph Stalin thought of nothing else. See Cadogan, Sir Alexander, The Diaries of Sir Alexander Cadogan, 1938-1945, (ed. by David Dilks), p. 420.

interests, nor on how best to economise on resources. It was instead a rather tentative and unreasoned compromise. It was bound to fail.

This compromise was due to the internal pressures within the Party; it was also because the Government was so involved in time-consuming cost-effective exercises and other feasibility studies, that it failed to perceive the contradictions within its broader defence doctrine. But there was no question of Britain being able to maintain both an effective role in Europe and East of Suez on £2,000 million. The Cabinet could not or did not wish to face that question.

The inherent conflict in the policy was sagely observed by the *Economist*. "By 1970" it said, "the defence budget will be smaller than it would have been if he (Mr. Healey) had not applied the screw, but still quite a lot above that nice round figure Mr. Wilson twirls aloft. It sounds an anti-climax. But dramatic changes were never a possibility".[1] The Government inherited defences wrecked by 'chronic overstretch' and yet its defence review was supposed to be cutting defence spending by a further 15 per cent. The contradiction in policy had become appallingly obvious.[2]

The Government's rhetoric seemed to imply that a new and splendid review of defence policy was under way. The review appeared likely to be a declaration of faith in the World Role, though it proved to be but the prelude to a different and more modest if not realistic policy.[2]

[1] Economist, Vol. 216, 17th July, 1965, p. 216.

[2] see Martin, L. W., The Long Recessional, IISS, November, 1968.

C H A P T E R IX

THE DEFENCE REVIEW - ITS RISE AND FALL

The Defence White Paper of February 1966 marked a crucial stage in Britain's withdrawal from East of Suez, for the much vaunted Defence Review spelt out a significant change in Britain's position in that area.

It achieved this in three important respects; "First, Britain will not undertake major operations of war except in co-operation with allies. Secondly, we will not accept an obligation to provide another country with military assistance unless it is prepared to provide us with facilities we need to make such assistance effective in time. Finally, there will be no attempt to maintain defence facilities in an independent country againsts its wishes".[1]

These three conditions seemed quite specific and explicit, but they actually encouraged many different interpretations. To some Governments it indicated that Britain was a spent force, as a major extra-European power and was now a weak auxiliary of the U.S.; to others it suggested that no real limitation had been imposed on independent British capability.[2]

The Review was a Government attempt to set broad objectives with depleted resources. The ultimate responsibility lay with the Prime Minister and the Cabinet; but below them the resolution of critical issues was taken in the Defence and Overseas Policy Committee - D.O.P.C. as the Ministry of Defence preferred to call it. This had all the 'heavyweights' - the Prime Minister as Chairman, the Foreign and Commonwealth

[1] Defence Review, February, 1966, Cmnd. 2901, p.7.

[2] See Brown, Neville, Arms Without Empire, 1967.

Secretaries, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Home and Defence Secretaries, and other senior ministers; in addition the Chiefs of Staff attended from time to time. They in turn were supported by a committee of senior officials serving on the Defence and Overseas Policy (Official) Committee, chaired by the Secretary to the Cabinet, with a number of Permanent Secretaries and the Chief of the Defence Staff as members. Its job was to see that defence policy kept in line with existing commitments and resources and that necessary adjustments were made in time, and without exposing the country to military danger.

It was clear, however, that the 1966 White Paper constituted an important phase in the withdrawal from East of Suez, since it emphatically declared against Britain acting alone in another Indonesian-type confrontation. It was also clear that the White Paper indicated that the U.K. was even more heavily reliant on U.S. military power and political initiative. This position was underscored by the Prime Minister who declared that "Not only have we for all time pledged this Government against any war - in Europe, out of Europe, West of Suez, East of Suez - in which Britain would fight alone, not only have we renounced such a war, but our whole defence policy .... is based on the fact that .... this nation neither can nor should fight any war except a collective war, under or for the U.N., or with our allies".[1]

The clear limitations on British action declared in the White Paper, was further advertised by the critical decision not to build another aircraft carrier.[2] Although the Carrier-Fill debate was essentially an in-house debate, with powerful strategic and political arguments deployed by the entrenched service interests, the financial decision

[1] Speech to Parliamentary Labour Party, 15th June, 1966.

[2] See Martin, L. W., The Sea in Modern Strategy, 1967.

reflected a balanced but not necessarily correct assessment of long-term strategic interests. Nevertheless, it is important to examine and isolate the main arguments involved because the decision did seriously erode Britain's World Role.

The pro-carrier lobby was presided over by Christopher Mayhew, who, together with Admiral Luce, resigned over the issue. In a dramatic personal statement to the House of Commons, Mr. Mayhew advanced four reasons why as Navy Minister he had taken the view that the carriers were essential in an East of Suez role. The first, was that beyond the range of fixed land bases "... only carriers can provide the air strike and defence to protect naval shipping or amphibious force...." The second was that carriers "... provide essential re-insurance against the loss of land-air bases". Finally Mr. Mayhew emphasized the great "... deterrent power" of carriers, and finally he emphasized their extreme ..... flexibility..".[1]

There can be no doubt about the influence and determination of the pro-carrier lobby. But could one aircraft carrier really have made much difference to the East of Suez role? Mr. Mayhew evidently believed that it would have made the whole difference between a carrier fleet that was viable and one that was not.

Admiral Sir Frank Hopkins, then Deputy Chief of Naval Staff, and a leading supporter of the carrier, remembered the scenarios the Secretary of State set for a number of situations which Britain could face in the 1970s in areas like the Far East and Indian Ocean:

"The job could be done with the existing carrier force and Naval aircraft, but to show that the carrier force could be dispensed with

[1] Vol. 725, H. of C., 22nd February, 1966, Col. 258.

and replaced by shore-based aircraft proved more difficult.

'Many devices had to be resorted to in order to do so, such as assuming the existence of bases that were not there, and never likely to be; crediting the F-111 with a performance in which even its most ardent supporter could scarcely believe, and in the event never materialized; assuming almost super-human achievements in logistic support by the R.A.F.; assuming over-flying rights of countries in Europe, Africa and Asia which were unlikely to be allowed in the event; and even, in one study, moving Australia 600 miles to the North-West in order to bring certain targets within range of the already elastic radius of action of the F-111.'[1]

Mr. Healey repudiated these arguments although he did admit that the carrier decision was "... by far the most difficult problem I had to settle in the course of the Defence Review".[2]

The Defence Minister declared that carriers failed to give value for money and that they were indispensable only for "... the landing or withdrawal of troops in enemy territory in the face of air attack and outside the range of our own land-based aircraft".[3] To the evident astonishment of the Opposition front-bench Mr. Healey gave the Suez campaign as an example of where carriers had been needed, but he sarcastically reassured the House that a similar operation was now unlikely. Moreover, he advanced the thesis that if Britain were to get involved in a similar intervention operation she would need at least five or six carriers and that the Admiralty Board had already admitted "... that the Navy could not possibly man more than four

[1] Policies of Power, op. cit., pp. 198-199.

[2] Vol. 725, H. of C., 7th March, 1966, Cols. 1789-90.

[3] Vol. 725, H. of C., 7th March, 1966, Col. 1792.

carriers in all and even then only at the expense of important elements in the rest of the Fleet".[1]

Mr. Healey also questioned the air-strike capacity of the carriers, asserting that the Hermes had a striking capability of "... only seven Buccanners - the equivalent of three F111A's".[2] He urged the House to remember that "... the attributable cost of the Navy's front line carrier-based aircraft tends to be between two and two and a half times higher than that of comparable aircraft based on land."[3] According to Mr. Healey it was on this point that the Navy really lost its case. "They argued on the wrong grounds" he said, "by trying to defend the carrier, not as a protection for the Fleet, but as a sea-strike aircraft, where it was ludicrously ineffective compared to land-based aircraft. You can't keep a carrier operating at full load for more than ten days at a time - and we could never have had more than one carrier in one place at a time."[4]

The Defence Minister declared that "... a new carrier could not become operational until 1973, when the rest of our carriers would be in the last phase of their active life", and he believed that by the mid 1970s Britain "... should be able to reprovide the necessary elements of the carriers' capability more cheaply by other means".[5]

The mass of detail and technical evidence about the relative performance of carriers, the F111 and other weapons systems, supported Mr. Healey's thesis. But the carrier issue dominated the defence debate since it constituted the central instrument of the Royal Navy. In fact,

[1] Vol. 725, H. of C., 7th March, 1966, Col. 1790.

[2] Vol. 725, H. of C., 8th March, 1966, Col. 2043.

[3] Vol. 725, H. of C., 7th March, 1966, Col. 1791.

[4] Natural Alliance for the West, op. cit. p. 30.

[5] Vol. 725, H. of C., 22nd February, 1966, Col. 241.

the death of the carrier provoked a loss of self-confidence in the Royal Navy. This loss of esteem was but the prelude to a wider sense of national decline. Yet even if the cancellation entailed only a "small sacrifice" to Mr. Healey, to many it was another inexorable weakening of Britain's East of Suez capability.[1]

The cancellation of the carrier was only perhaps the first step towards one instance of an overall weakening of the East of Suez role.[2]

The White Paper also proposed that the British presence in Aden should be wound-up in 1968 and that Britain's forces in the Middle East should then be restricted to the Persian Gulf. The extent to which the loss of Aden could be compensated by improvements at Bahrain and a greater utilization of 'baselets' was a big imponderable. But in view of the fear that Diego Garcia and Aldabra suffered from periodic flooding, it appeared a doubtful proposition.

The extent to which the Government was diminishing Britain's East of Suez role however, was nevertheless difficult to assess. What would the three conditions in the Defence White Paper mean in practice? Although it seemed certain that the Government would in fact be reluctant to mount any operation, however minor, for fear of it escalating into a major operation. Nevertheless, it was difficult to determine how greatly the Government would feel constrained by the three conditions or inhibited by the absence of the cancelled aircraft carrier.

It also remained equally obscure what effect, if any, the Governments proposals for savings in foreign exchange would have on the World Role. Mr. Healey announced in March that the Government planned, when confrontation ended, to "... reduce the number of troops we keep

[1] Adams, J. H. 'What Should Britain Do?', The Navy, July 1968.

[2] Mr. Mayhew regarded the Air Staff's assumptions relating to aircraft range, pilot endurance, training, the number of aircraft needed etc. required to displace maritime airpower as likely to carry unacceptable risks for the Navy. Britain's Role Tomorrow, p. 140.

outside Europe by over 30 per cent..."[1], and in July, at the height of Britain's economic distress, the Prime Minister told the House, "We have also reviewed the level of military and economic aid which we can afford next year. The Government have decided on firm programmes which will reduce our overseas Government expenditure, military and civil, by at least £100 million".[2]

This statement by Mr. Wilson was pregnant with possibilities. He did not say in what proportion the cuts would be military rather than civilian; nor did he say whether the cuts merely involved the bringing forward of economies rather than an actual increase in economies. Finally, it was difficult to determine to what degree the proposed savings in foreign exchange were likely to exceed those which would have resulted as an inevitable consequence of the end of Confrontation.

However the actual and potential danger to the World Role came from the overall budgetary cut of a further £180 million that the Government was pledged to make by 1969/70. The cancellation of the carrier accounted for £80 million, but the remaining saving of £100 million would be plainly difficult to make. Indeed, it was clear that additional defence economies of that magnitude could not be made without some diminution of the overseas presence.

It was, moreover, becoming likely that the Government might have to settle for a defence bill somewhat lower than £2000 million in 1969-70. This was because by mid-way through 1966 it had become clear that the national plan was a non-starter and that a defence budget of £2000 million in 1969-70 would represent 6.5% of Britain's G.N.P.

1 Vol. 725, H. of C., 7th March, 1966, Col. 1778.

2 Vol. 732, H. of C., 20th July, 1966, Col. 632.

and not 5.9% as planned. Yet, Mr. Callaghan, made it clear in August that "The policy of Her Majesty's Government is to reduce the proportion of defence expenditure to G.N.P. to a level not higher than 6% by 1969-70".[1] If this were so, Mr. Healey was going to be forced to introduce even greater defence cut-backs than planned in the Defence Review and the East of Suez role was in even greater doubt.

Mr. Healey was not anxious to face up to the situation. The February White Paper did not even identify the areas where the cuts needed to bring defence spending down to £2000 million were to be achieved. The Defence Minister in his first contribution to the defence debate in March appeared equally unsure. Mr. Mayhew however gave an ominous warning to the House about the proposed defence cuts; "The House should know" he said "that not all these things are specified in the defence White Paper. In the case of the Navy, they are much wider than merely the cancellation of the CVA01 but they are not specified".[2] Mr. Powell, the Opposition's chief defence spokesman, meanwhile predicted drastic cuts in the Army, and underlined the importance of "... well-authenticated reports that the Department of Defence are thinking in terms of a reduction of the order of 16,000 men in the Regular Army by the target year of 1970".[3]

It was only in the closing moments of the defence debate that Mr. Healey finally admitted how he was going to save the missing £100 million. "... when we are able to reduce our deployment in the Far East", he said "we shall make further reductions in equipment and manpower which will save the additional £100 million".[4] The worst

[1] Vol. 733, H. of C., 9th August, 1966, Col. 1385. Oral answers.

[2] Vol. 725, H. of C., 22nd February, 1966, Col. 257.

[3] Vol. 725, H. of C., 7th March, 1966, Col. 1753.

[4] Vol. 725, H. of C., 8th March, 1966, Cols. 2045-6.

scenario of the East of Suez protagonists now seemed within an ace of realization.

In addition to the overt defence cuts foreshadowed in the White Paper there was the near certainty that these cuts did not amount to a once and for all weakening of the East of Suez role. It was clear that they were only the first of a number of decisions. For the Defence Review had done very little to remove overstretch, but on the contrary had exacerbated it.

The Prime Minister and Secretary of State for Defence had been forced to admit that £2000 million was not a realistic figure around which to build a defence policy which included a major commitment East of Suez. The £2000 million figure corresponded with no realistic foreign or defence policy. The Navy Minister later put the same point more concisely, "... it is too small if we want to stay East of Suez and much too big if we do not".[1]

Clearly an intolerable contradiction had emerged because the Government had started to cut the forces' capability while leaving commitments substantially intact. "I am in favour of drastic defence cuts", said Mr. Mayhew, "but there must also be drastic cuts in commitments to match".[2] The Navy Minister then expanded upon the theme that the proposed cuts in capability were significant: "... the cuts are overwhelmingly in the realm of equipment and weapons and not in the realm of administration, pay and pensions, which amounts to one-half of the total budget. Thus one-sixth of the total budget represents much more than one-sixth of the budget for arms, weapons and equipment. It represents a very heavy cut indeed in military capabilities."[3] Mr. Mayhew

[1] Vol. 725, H. of C., 22nd February, 1966, Col. 256.

[2] Mr. Mayhew's resignation statement, issued on the day he resigned, 19th February, 1966. Keesings Contemporary Archives, p. 21259.

[3] Vol. 725, H. of C., 22nd February, 1966, Col. 257.

gave an apocalyptic warning "... all the time the challenge is growing, the task increases and our resources dwindle. It is quite plain that the defence policy set out in the White Paper will open up a vast gap in the 1970s between what the servicemen are expected to do and what they are given to do the job with."[1]

The *New Statesman* strongly supported this analysis, arguing that the cuts in spending were "... in no way matched by corresponding reductions in our commitments, even allowing for the end of the Aden base".[2] The logic of this analysis pointed to the need to cut commitments to match capability cuts. And the obvious place to cut commitments was East of Suez.

There was a great deal of force in this analysis. Britain was, indeed, in a cleft stick where it must either spend more, do less, or rely more on others. The White Paper had however, sought to grapple with this problem. It reduced Britain's commitment East of Suez by foreshadowing a withdrawal from Aden and placing limitations on the scale of operations in which Britain would in future become involved. In addition the White Paper promised to reduce substantially the deployment of forces in the Mediterranean and also, within a few years, to give up a fixed-base in the Caribbean and in Sothern Africa. All these measures possessed merit and would ease the contradictions in Labour's defence policy and allow the Government to retain a residual imperial role.[3]

Nevertheless, in spite of the February White Paper, the Government was compelled before the year was out, to contemplate making further cuts

[1] Vol. 725, H. of C., 22nd February, 1966, Col. 260.

[2] New Statesman, Vol. 71, 25th February, 1966, p. 245.

[3] Mr Michael Stewart argued "we have neither the wish nor the intention to abandon the world east of Suez". A statement made in July 1966. See The Times, 1st July, 1966.

East of Suez: indeed, there is some evidence that the Cabinet even looked at the dramatic prospect of a total withdrawal. This was made clear by a stunning admission by Denis Healey on 22nd October 1969, the significance of which curiously escaped a gathering of distinguished officers at the Royal United Services Institution.

At that meeting the Minister for Defence emphatically declared that the decision taken in January 1968 to withdraw British forces from South East Asia by 1971 "... accelerated our final withdrawal from South East Asia by only twelve months compared with the earliest date envisaged immediately after Confrontation".[1] This made it plain that a date for withdrawal was provisionally 'envisaged' after Confrontation in August 1966, and that the earliest date agreed upon was 1972. Richard Crossman noted in his diary the agonized confusion of the Cabinet on the question of the timing of withdrawal.[2] He claimed to have "got the impression that the Defence Committe want us out of Singapore in 1970 and very much hope the Australians will turn us down when we ask for a British presence there after our withdrawal from Singapore. In fact we have to wait for facts to force withdawal on us so, though we are not in any way committed to withdrawal, the Chiefs of Staff have been told to work on the assumption that Singapore will be untenable long before 1970 and that we shall not transfer over troops to Australia".[2]

Therefore the latest date set for withdrawal in line with the traditional practice of setting a three or four year span,was probably 1975 or 1976. This time-scale would seem plausible because Mr. Healey was one of the most eloquent East of Suez advocates and it is known that, at this time, he was thinking in terms of a British overseas presence up

[1] The Government's Defence Policy, The Journal of the Royal United Services Institute, December, 1969.

[2] Crossman, Vol. I., op. cit., p. 456.

until the mid 1970s. "Even at the time of the Defence Review", he was to say later, "I didn't think we would be East of Suez much after 1975".[1]

The significance of Mr. Healey's Royal United Service Institution statement is immense. It strikingly confirms that the dramatic events of 1967 and 1968, considered to be the decisive factors in the withdrawal from East of Suez, perhaps only made a difference of months to the date of withdrawal; conversely, it gives a far greater significance to the events of 1964-66 than had hitherto been supposed. Moreover, if the Government decided in 1966 to withdraw from East of Suez sometime after 1972, it renders the carrier F111 hiatus somewhat irrelevant, since the new carrier could not come on station before 1973 at the earliest. It could be that, in February, when the decision on the carrier was taken, the Cabinet was already aware that Britain would not be East of Suez for very long after the CVA01 came into service. However this explanation for the carrier decision was never officially admitted but it may, nevertheless, have been a residual factor in that decision.

Mr. Healey's RUSI lecture, then, inevitably provokes a dramatically different analysis of the Labour Government's decision to abandon the World Role to the generally accepted official version. But what were the events of 1966 which so critically undermined Britain's East of Suez role? Was it the economic crisis of July, the precipitate end to Confrontation in August, the growing Eurocentric roles discernable towards the end of the year or the reluctance of Britain's allies to assume a greater share of the defence burden?

It cannot be contended that the fluctuating position of the East of Suez role during 1966 was due wholly to the secular economic situation

[1] ibid.

of Britain which the periodic financial crises rather underscored. Nevertheless, it certainly gave a marked impetus to the Government's determination to cut defence spending. The economic position throughout the year was not good; at best the economy might respond to careful management, at worst it might be beyond whatever management the Treasury could achieve. The May Budget was not as tough as feared, almost certainly because the Chancellor was anxious to reconcile the expansionist school of Mr. Brown, and the deflationists within the Treasury. He failed. That the budget was deflationary enough was doubtful, but of critical importance was the seamen's strike which followed two weeks later. The subsequently poor trade figures were attributed to the strike and the Prime Minister, identified the communists as guiding the industrial unrest for political ends.[1]

The strike ended on 1st July. But the publication of the steel nationalisation bill on the very day the strike ended and by the resignation of Mr. Frank Cousins from the Government just two days later, alarmed and depressed the stock market. Foreign bankers deserted the pound as they perceived what they regarded as an ideologically motivated Government likely to be confronted by militant trade unions led by renegrade Frank Cousins.

The overall effect of this spectre was disastrous for Britain. There was during the first week in July a heavy run on the pound and the Government was forced to act and raise the Bank Rate to 7% and impose on 10th July a wage freeze and severe deflationary measures. Moreover, any hope that confidence would quickly return was dashed by George Brown's attempted resignation. In the event, he was persuaded to withdraw his

[1] Wilson, op. cit., pp. 308-311.

threatened resignation, but the split in the Cabinet between the devaluers, Brown, Jenkins and Crosland, and the deflationists, Wilson and Callaghan, was brought into the open.

In this hectic atmosphere the demand for defence cuts grew in volume. The strident demand was all the more potent because Britain's allies revealed no great concern to reduce the pressure on the harassed Labour Government. Government Ministers made hurried visits to Bonn, Canberra and Washington, but to no avail.

The clear purpose of these diplomatic manouvres was to persuade Britain's allies to help to take up the strain of spending nearly £100 million in foreign exchange in her World Role.[1] While the British Government had made quick-fix plans to ease this foreign exchange burden by reducing those forces overseas by perhaps one-third by 1970, the immediate burden still persisted with ominous magnitude. It was not made any less burdensome by Labour's decision to acquire so much American equipment.[1]

Mr. Healey expressed a widespread attitude on both the right and left of his Party when he said that Britain could hardly go on accepting such a heavy burden East of Suez "... if her neighbours and competitors in Western Europe are sitting back and raking in the money".[2] In consequence the Government adopted a somewhat militant attitude with the West Germans over the foreign exchange costs of B.A.O.R.[3] On 25th October, the Chancellor warned "It remains the Government's policy that these costs should by one means or another be covered in full".[4]

[1] The total costs of American aircraft over ten year period from 1966 were the Phanton £755 million, F111 £425 million and the Hercules £185 million. See Mason, R. Vol. 756, H. of C., 21st December, 1967, Col. 517. The total dollar cost over the same period was £600 million.

[2] Vol. 725, H. of C., 7th March, 1966, Cols. 1781-2.

[3] Foreign exchange loss to Germany was £94 million a year gross but allowing for offset agreement net figure was about £40 million a year.

[4] Vol. 734, H. of C., 25th October, 1966, Col. 805. Oral answers.

Mr. Thomson, the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, endorsed this demand in December, "The foreign exchange costs of maintining our forces in Germany must be covered in full..."[1]

Nevertheless, despite all the hyperbole about getting the matter resolved by the end of the year, Mr. Thomson in his delicate role as the Cabinet's chief debt collector, had to report to the Commons that it had not yet been possible to adhere to the timetable agreed. Mr. Paul Johnson of the New Statesman expressed the pent-up anger of many Labour supporters of both wings who recalled with astonishment that "only a few weeks ago a very senior member of the Cabinet swore to me that, come what may, the Rhine Army would be cut by 20,000 next year".[2]

In an attempt to pacify the Party, Mr. Thomson issued an ultimatum, "If by the end of June 1967, agreement has not been reached .... Her Majesty's Government would have to regard themselves as freer to take whatever decisions seem necessary to them to cover the foreign exchange costs of their forces in Germany 1967-68".[3] The Left was not amused. "Does my Right Hon. Friend appreciate", asked the still unconvinced Michael Foot, "that he will have a first class row on his hands if we do not get a better statement than this".[4]

The British Government made as little impression in Washington as it had in Bonn. On his return from the American capital the previous December the Prime Minister had told the House, "Taking the East of Suez role as a whole there was a lively recognition on both sides that we could fulfil the kind of role I think it is our duty to fulfil

[1] Vol. 738, H. of C., 12th December,1966, Col. 45.

[2] New Statesman, Vol. 72, 16th December, 1966, p.900.

[3] Vol. 738, H. of C., 12th December, 1966, Col. 44.

[4] Vol. 738, H. of C., 12th December, 1966, Col. 46.

only the basis of interdependence with our allies and by burden sharing in terms of both commitment and cost".[1] And yet it was clear that both the Americans and the Australians were not prepared to be lectured to when they were already carrying their share of the burden in Vietnam. Moreover, the growing disenchantment with the Government's defence policy did not only emanate from the clash of 'national interests' from within the alliance which antagonized allies; there now appeared important political divisions within the Labour Party itself.

The Government's relationship with the Party both in and outside Parliament was at its most tranquil before 1966. The Prime Minister's position following the 1964 Election turned out to be one of almost towering strength. The Party had pulled off a stunning victory at the polls in March, and the Defence White Paper had of course foreshadowed substantial limitations on British operations overseas. And yet from Whitsum to Christmas was a period of bitter controversey over defence matters which cut right across ideological divisions within the Party. Indeed there was the improbable alliance of the most unlikely line-up of Mendleson, Mikardo, the Kerr's, Wyatt and Mayhew opposing the Government's defence policy.

On 15th June, the Prime Minister, at a meeting of the P.L.P., propounded in a remarkable speech the Government's East of Suez policy. He spoke against a motion sponsored by both the Left and Right wings which called for a "decisive reduction" in Britain's military commitments East of Suez by 1969-70 "including withdrawal from Malaysia, Singapore and the Persian Gulf ... resulting in a defence budget below £1,750,000,000 at

[1] Vol. 722, H. of C., 21st December, 1965, Col. 1903.

1964 prices".[1] On this celebrated occasion the anti-East of Suez faction was decisively defeated, but at the annual conference in the autumn the anti-East of Suez faction won a striking victory on the same motion.

However even the decision to withdraw from Aden appeared to compromise the Government. Mr. Thomson was not in any doubt about the reaction of much of his Party when he said that "Some of my Hon. friends have expressed scepticism if not incredulity at the thought that at a time when we are withdrawing from the Aden base we are adding to our forces in the Persian Gulf".[2]

There were many variables which increased the opposition to the Government's defence policy. Not the least of these was the embarrassing fact that Wilson's Government was spending in 1966 a higher percentage of G.N.P. on defence than was spent in the last year of the Conservative Government. The belief that the economy could be transformed without greatly reducing defence expenditure was slowly but severely fading. The economy, the left felt, would never have got in such a weak position if the Government had withdrawn from East of Suez.

It was, however, only in 1966, against an ominous background of incomes policies and wage restraint that it became starkly apparent to the Party that an obvious conflict of priorities existed between its social and defence commitments. When this conflict of priorities was recognized the Party's watery gaze turned away from those emotionally charged and ideologically contentious aspects of foreign policy, such as Vietnam and Rhodesia, and towards those aspects which consumed a huge chunk of the nation's wealth. The East of Suez role was a blatant

[1] Keesings Contemporary Archives, p. 21494.

[2] Vol. 737, H. of C., 6th December, 1966, Col. 1281.

extravagence. The Party both in Parliament and outside was suddenly more concerned with the cash nexus than with principles which extolled the virtues of an imperial heritage.

The economic crisis of 1966 also diminished the notion of infallability which had enveloped Mr. Wilson for the previous three years. The feeling gained ground in the Party that if the Prime Minister could be so misinformed about the state of the economy, he could be equally misinformed about strategic questions. There was a growing indeed militant challenge to the authority of the Prime Minister. His position, so towering in the spring, began to decline swiftly during the sweltering heat of the climactic summer.

Labour's brilliant victory at the polls in March looked as if it could induce a greater sense of unity within the Party, reflecting the euphoria of success, but it soon dissolved in a sour mood of disenchantment. Now the Prime Minister could no longer discipline the Left by pointing to a small Labour majority. The majority had risen to 97 seats, and this expanded significantly the room for manoeuvre available to Mr. Wilson's Left Wing critics. The Left could now act in relative safety knowing that it would not bring the Government down.

The central thread connecting both Left and Right was their distaste for a greatly inflated defence budget and this was critical because the Left required an alliance with the Right if its influence over the Labour leadership was to prove effective.

The controversy over the East of Suez issue reached right into the Cabinet rooms and, as Crossman has revealed, throughout late 1965 and 1966, it was the anti-East of Suez posture which was gaining strength.

The elevation of Roy Jenkins and Anthony Crosland to the Cabinet in 1965 and the significant conversion of Michael Stewart to the European cause, gave the Cabinet a greater anti-East of Suez group. Mr. Paul Johnson contended that the anti-East of Suez faction "... have half the Cabinet behind them, two thirds of the junior Ministers and three-quarters of the Parliamentary Labour Party".[1] Mr. Crossman also indicates that Cabinet unrest was widespread but it appears that Mr. Johnson's arithmetic was suspect. Mr. Crossman asserts that "East of Suez is solely the P.M.s line - the P.M. with George Wigg's backing. Undoubtedly, it's all a fantastic illusion".[2] There was a deal of truth, however, in the contention that Mr. Johnson made that "As things stand the East of Suez issue looks like becoming the Party's first, big internal dispute since Wilson became leader".[3]

The anti-East of Suez mood persisted during 1966 not only because it was clear that Britain could not afford to remain over-committed but also because of growing Cabinet enxieties about the relevance of the World Role to Britain's security. This latter doubt gained momentum from the increasing disillusionment with the Commonwealth and the growing awareness of the politico-strategic importance of Europe.

The growing sense of crisis in the Commonwealth connection really centred around the Rhodesian issue. But other momentous events were under way well before the crisis atmosphere of mid-1966. First on the 9th April, 1965, fighting broke out between two Commonwealth countries, India and Pakistan. This in turn led to the dramatic rupture of

[1] New Statesman, Vol. 71, 3rd June, 1966, p. 804.

[2] Crossman, op. cit., p. 540.

[3] op. cit.

diplomatic relations between Pakistan and Malaysia and to the sending of arms from Indonesia to Pakistan. The sorrow and disappointment of the British Government in witnessing two Commonwealth members waging a bitter conflict was almost negated by the embarrassment of the Soviet Union opportunistically offering 'good offices' in settling the dispute.

The positive long-term repercussions of the Tashkent meeting on 4th January, 1966, were, for the Commonwealth, incalculable.

Yet the real and admitted source of Labour's disillusionment with the Commonwealth came much earlier, however, over Rhodesia. On 12th October 1965, Mr. Wilson proposed that a Commonwealth mission should go to Rhodesia, but Mr. Ian Smith rejected this diplomatic initiative. It was not 'practical' said the Rhodesian leader and the prospects of a settlement quickly receded.[1] Tanzania broke off relations with Britain on 15th December and Ghana did the same a day later.

It was regarded as likely by the Wilson Administration that the divisions in the Commonwealth could be narrowed at the Prime Ministers' meeting in Lagos on 11th-12th January 1966, but two days before the conference sat, Ghana released a remarkable statement: "Ghana believes that Britain has lost all control of the situation and is unwilling to take any steps by which its authority might be reasserted. It is time for those more determined and more capable than Britain to take charge."[2] At the conference itself Sierra Leone, Uganda and Zambia all predictably called for the use of force to end the rebellion. Britain was pushed on to the strategic defensive.

[1] The Times, October 14th, 1965.

[2] Keesings Contemporary Archives, p. 21197.

A further Commonwealth Prime Ministers Conference was held in London between 6th - 15th September. It was even more disastrous than the Lagos meeting. The Indian delegate talked of a 'crisis of confidence' in the Commonwealth and Zambia heightened tension by threatening to break away if force were not used to settle the Rhodesia question. The manifest failure of the Zambian foreign minister, Mr. Kapwepwe, to achieve this objective led to his much-publicized departure from London. He declared himself as 'disgusted' with the British Government and emotionally declared that "This conference makes us know that Mr. Wilson is coming to be a racialist".[1] This absurd 'proposition' was resented by Mr. Wilson as he subsequently made clear. His observations on the subject indicate the nature of his personal disenchantment with the Commonwealth connection.[2] Mr. Wilson wrote that "there was one subject before us, Rhodesia, and Britain was in the dock, as we had been a month earlier in New York, though this time were were dealing with principals rather than distant plenipotentiaries not all of whom represented their principals views. I presented Britain's position and then the debate began. It was hard-hitting though somewhat repetitive, as one African leader after another sought to prove how much more African he was than his neighbour. From Asia, Cyprus and the Caribbean the meassage of condemnation was the same. Then Lee Kuan Yew of Singapore spoke, an off-the-cuff, unprepared speech of some 40 minutes at a level of sophistication rarely achieved in any of the Commonwealth Conferences which I have attended. I said to my secretary that it

[1] Keesings Contemporary Archives, p. 21638. This charge was repeated in Lusaka by the Zambian Foreign Minister on his arrival. He again described Mr. Wilson as a 'racialist and an imperialist'.

[2] Wilson, op. cit. p. 255.

should have been recorded and published in a journal such as *Encounter* to keep a record of what the modern world was really about. Lester Pearson said exactly the same to me after the morning's session".[1]

The Commonwealth conferences were, then, a new and dramatic foci of division and discord rather than unity and of national interdependence. The search for agreement was in vain. The hurtful disagreements that characterised Commonwealth relations in 1966 were to become endemic. They were also to increase.

It must have been a disappointment for Mr. Wilson who had consistently shown a great regard for the Commonwealth. But Mr. Wilson could never admit this and he even believed that "the Conference ended in an atmosphere of unity, even euphoria".[2] In fact the Commonwealth was neither the economic nor the political reality he had imagined. His rather grand design of uniting the Commonwealth in political terms and expanding its economic role proved unworkable.

This grand design was a chimera and this fact steadily became obvious throughout the first two years of Mr. Wilson's administration.

By Setpember 1966, breaking point for the Commonwealth had been reached. It was now an incontrovertible fact that the Commonwealth could no longer constitute Mr. Wilson's ideal diplomatic instrument. Clearly the Prime Minister had been denigrated and put 'on trial' by conference. The days of British imperial benevolence were over.

British disillusionment with the Commonwealth was virtually complete. Britain's interest now turned more and more on Europe. Yet the Government's attitude towards the continental commitment was cool and aloof. It viewed with disdain the recurring crises in the Common Market

[1] op. cit., p. 256.

[2] ibid.

and appeared to think that unless and until the Community had settled its short-term problems, there was no logic in Britain attempting to negotiate terms on entry. The Prime Minister had admitted that "There is no immediate issue of our being asked or being able to join the Common Market..."[1] and for the time being he directed his European policies into politically irrelevant thoughts about "..a single trading market for the whole of Europe ..."[2]

Mr. Stewart, his otherwise rather orthodox foreign secretary, on the other hand was already making favourable noises about joining the E.E.C., but throughout the rest of 1965 Mr. Wilson almost passionately denied that the issue of entry into Europe was being considered. According to the *Sunday Times* the Prime Minister told George Brown in January, "George I've got news for you. You'll be startled by what I'm going to say. We're going in".[4] Mr. Wilson's sudden conversion was revealed with rather more caution in the House of Commons; "... the position is that we shall go in if we get the right terms".[5] This proved a commitment subject to unending qualification. Mr. Brown was a convinced pro-European. His own account of the proceedings revealed the trend in Government thinking but Mr. Brown however tends to regard Wilson's conversion as tactical.[6]

[1] John Mackintosh argued in an article in International Affairs that Britain's relationship with the Commonwealth had changed over the years in regard to the volume of exports Britain sent to the Commonwealth. "By 1966-8 the proportion going to the Commonwealth had fallen to 29% and that to Europe had risen to 20%". But the cost of overseas defence had risen to £449 million a year by 1967 as opposed to £3 million a year from 1920-1938. See International Affairs, Vol. 45, 1969, pp. 250-51.

[2] Vol. 716, H. of C., 19th July, 1965, Col. 1141.

[3] ibid.

[4] Sunday Times, 7th May, 1967.

[5] Vol. 724, H. of C., 10th February, 1966, Col. 616.

[6] Brown, George, In My Way, pp. 219-220.

It was however, not really until after the election had been won, that Labour began to admit more openly to its Common Market strategy. The drift of its intentions was revealed in the new Government formed by Mr. Wilson on 5th April 1966. Mr. Thomson was charged with the responsibility of articulating and defining Britain's political relations with Europe, and Mr. Brown required to define her economic relations. The Eurocentric posture was now on the Cabinet's agenda. The 'national interest' was about to be reformulated.

It was during July that the European policy gained considerable momentum for, almost simultaneously, the E.E.C. agreed upon an agricultural policy and Britain faced another economic crisis. The Common Market strategy was an essential part of the Cabinet's agonized discussions on how to resolve the deepening economic crisis. The Cabinet was split between those like George Brown and Roy Jenkins who, at the price set by Pompidou, wanted to devalue to join Europe, and those others who continued to support deflation and the anglo-American 'special relationship'. Mr. Brown lost his battle and impetuously resigned, but the intervention by a hundred Labour M.P.s restored him to the Cabinet. Emotionally moved, Mr. Brown returned to the Cabinet to fight the European cause once more. On 10th August, he was moved into the Foreign Office - the turn towards Europe was now to become irreversible fact.[1]

It might seem that any British initiative towards Europe would be discouraged in Washington, but this was not so. President Johnson moved to underpin the Kennedy Grand Design and that meant Britain should

[1] His arrival was unusual. He entered the F.O. through a door used by Bevin twenty years earlier and was carried in a lift which had been slowed down because of Bevin's heart condition. The official welcoming party with a large press contingent were however waiting outside the main door. ibid.

stay East of Suez. He did not believe that this was in any way inconsistent with pressing Britain's entry into E.E.C.[1] Moreover, President Johnson's Administration had never been wholly convinced that Britain would be able to stay East of Suez for as long as the British Government had predicted.

The change in Labour's strategic perspective from one parliamentary session to another was always real, but somewhat obscure and consistently denied. For example, Labour's attitude for much of 1964 and 1965 was conditioned by its rejection of the E.E.C. because it would "not meet the five conditions".[2] From mid-way through 1965 to the early part of 1966, Labour still rejected a new approach to the Community but less vehemently: the five conditions were becoming less and less relevant. During the latter part of 1966 there was another perceptable shift. Labour now 'actively' wanted to go in "if the remaining obstacles could be removed".[3] These different statements marked a definite trend, taken separately not all that significant, but, to those well versed, put together they were extremely important.

By the end of 1966 there emerged a hardening of the Government's position. On November 10th, the Prime Minister announced to the House that the Government was about to engage on "... a new high level approach... to see whether the conditions exist - or do not exist - for fruitful negotiations".[4] Mr. Wilson for so long a pro-East of Suez man and an

[1] Johnson, B., The Vantage Point. p. 64.

[2] Those conditions were laid down by the NEC statement of September 1962. They were: 1. strong and binding safeguards for the trade and other interests of our friends and partners in the Commonwealth; 2.Freedom as at present to pursue our own foreign policy; 3. Fulfillment of the Government's pledge to our associates in the European Free Trade area; 4. The right to plan our economy; 5. Guarantees to safeguard the position of British agriculture.

[3] Vol. 735, H. of C., 10th November, 1966, Col. 1539.

[4] ibid.

anti-Common Marketeer, could no longer contain his new found enthusiasm. He could only do himself a mischief. "We mean business ..." he said and "we intend to start at - I was going to say at a hell of a pace ..."[1]. The pace was indeed hectic, as Messrs. Wilson and Brown made their diplomatic tour of European capitals.

The shift towards Europe was not a decisive factor in the weakening of the World Role. Nor was it as important as the need to bring commitments into line with the country's capabilities. Throughout 1966 the Government repeatedly emphasized the necessity for reducing Britain's commitments overseas. In his statement on the Defence Review on 22nd February, Mr. Denis Healey, the Minister for Defence, underlined why limitations had been imposed on Britain's East of Suez role. "In order to reduce overstretch", Mr. Healey explained, "we plan to cut our tasks overseas and then to keep a larger proportion of our forces in a home station and fewer abroad, and rely more on reinforcements by air in an emergency. This has meant certain changes in our current political commitments overseas."[2] This statement was pregnant with possibilities.

In the defence debate in March, Mr. Healey again returned to this theme: It is essential to reduce this overstretch, otherwise recruiting and re-engagement will fall, overstretch will increase - and so on, and so on, in a vicious circle .... for the last six months we have concentrated on planning to reduce our military tasks, so that we were able to save foreign exchange, reduce overstretch and make further savings in resources".[3] The down-grading of the East of Suez role,

[1] ibid.

[2] Vol. 725, H. of C., 22nd February, 1966, Col. 240.

[3] Vol. 725, H. of C., 7th March, 1966, Col. 1777.

reflected in the February Defence White Paper, was due, then to an attempt to bring commitments into line with manpower and equipment.[1]

The crying need for the White Paper to cut commitments was obvious - by now conceivably even accepted by the mandarins of the Foreign Office. According to Mr. Healey "The Defence Review compelled the Foreign Office for the first time to make decisions where it had previously avoded them".[2] Nevertheless, the Foreign Office publicly revealed no sign of such a conversion until the Review had been almost completed. During 1965 Mr. Healey had saved about £1,200 million on the aircraft projects and yet the Foreign Office had still adhered to an uncompromising and uncomprehending opposition to cut any commitment until a decision on the aircraft carrier had been made. The Defence Minister vigorously responded by attempting to point out that even if the carrier were cancelled, it would not replace the need to cut commitments. It was, though only as summer passed into winter 1965, and with a conspicuous absence of Foreign Office enthusiasm, that a decision on Aden was finally reached. The carrier decision was taken almost simultaneously.

Although the 1966 Defence White Paper marked a weakening of the East of Suez capability, it at least seemed possible that the cuts would go no further. Indeed, the Government continued to articulate plantigrade enthusiasm for the overseas role. In February Mr. Healey announced in the House that he had "... made it clear to all the allied Governments concerned that we would wish our forces to stay on in Malaysia and Singapore so long as the independent Governments of those countries wish them to do so on conditions which meet our military requirements".[3] Moreover, the Defence Minister went on to say that, even if Britain

[1] The Policies of Power, op. cit., p. 214.

[2] ibid.

[3] Vol. 725, H. of C., 22nd February, 1966, Col. 249.

were compelled to abandon these bases negotiation had already commenced with the Australians "... about the provision of alternative facilities in Australia".[1]

In March Mr. Healey blandly pontificated,as though the issue were beyond contention. "... that Britain has got to stay East of Suez in any case for many years".[2] The Defence Minister went on "The question is not whether we stay East of Suez, but in what strength and for what purpose and for how long".[3] Mr. Healey advanced the belief that the continued world role promoted Britain's "... important economic and political interests in every continent." "Moreover", said Mr. Healey, "the Commonwealth makes an indispensable contribution to world order and strengthens the international influence of all its members - including Britain".[4] Mr. Healey's imperial conviction was strongly emphasized and even the Gulf presence, which he personally valued less highly than the Far Eastern one, was claimed to be invaluable. "... the Gulf is an area of such vital importance, not only to the economy of Western Europe as a whole but also to world peace that it would be totally irresponsible for us to withdraw our forces from the area unless we were completely satisfied that peace and order would be maintained after our withdrawal".[5] Mr. Stewart strongly endorsed this argument. In a reference to the Gulf the foreign secretary said that "... if suddenly, British influence and responsibilities disappeared there, we would have an extremely disturbed situation which might interrupt the flow

[1] Vol. 725, H. of C., 22nd February, 1966, Col. 249.

[2] Vol. 725, H. of C., 7th March, 1966, Col. 1779.

[3] Vol. 725, H. of C., 7th March, 1966, Col. 1780.

[4] ibid.

[5] Vol. 725, H. of C., 7th March, 1966, Col. 1786-7.

of oil and which might be damaging to our economy..."[1] These words were the prelude to Harold Wilson's extraordinary personal intervention.

In June, in the face of a massive Party revolt over the East of Suez issue, the Prime Minister, at a meeting of the P.L.P., made what was by any yardstick a remarkable speech. He struck out in aggressive language. "Perhaps there are some members who would like to contract out and leave it to the Americans and Chinese, eyeball to eyeball, to face this thing out. The world is too small for that kind of attitude". The Prime Minister grimly warned "It is the surest prescription for a nuclear holocaust I could think of".[2] Mr. Wilson uttered every word with great conviction.

He made the East of Suez role sound indispensable. According to the Prime Minister it was at the same time invaluable both for operations with the United Nations and for operations solely in the 'national interest'. It made it possible to enforce the Beira patrol and, in so doing, he contended, would bring Rhodesia to its knees. It was imperative in preventing the spread of Chinese, Russian and even South African influence in Africa; and it was indispensable for the defence of Australia and New Zealand and in avoiding a situation where India became "... a cockpit forced to choose between Russia and America to protect them against China".[3] Mr. Wilson also exploited the anxiety of nuclear war, the fear of nuclear proliferation and even the concern of a resurgent Japan to support his case. In the light of such an analysis nobody could controvert the value of the overseas presence. So, in due course, the anti-East of Suez group was overwhelmed by almost a 5 to 1 ratio.

1 Vol. 725, H. of C., 8th March, 1966, Col. 1953.

2 Wilson, op. cit., p. 315.

3 Natural Alliance for the West, op. cit., p. 43.

It is certain that Mr. Wilson was not as impressed with the East of Suez role as his speech indicated. Britain's preference in Asia was seen by Harold Wilson as a means of preventing polarisation; a slick way of getting Left wing support for the contention that his moderating influence over America might prevent nuclear disaster. Denis Healey was discomforted by this analysis. He was appalled by the idea that Britain could help defend India from the Chinese; and the reported suggestion that the British Prime Minister had suggested deploying the Polaris force to the Far East in order to defer China seemed to him to be a nonsense .[1] But whatever his motivation the Prime Minister proved as flexible on this issue as on most others and over the next month or so things were to change the Government's assessment quite significantly. Indeed, Mr. Wilson admitted his error over the East of Suez role, though three years later: "I was asked about mistakes I had made in office, I instanced my clinging to our Suez role when facts were dictating a recessional. I was, I said, one of the last to be converted and it needed a lot of hard facts to convert me. Other of my colleagues, left wing and pro-European alike, were wiser in their perceptions".[2]

During July the East of Suez controversy reached a new phase. The economic situation again deteriorated and the end of confrontation was within sight. The growing economic crisis threatened to put additional constraints on defence policy and the end to confrontation created an obvious opportunity to make a grand policy change. While there was a sense of relief as well as of achievement at the end of

[1] The Policies of Power, op. cit., p. 216.

[2] Wilson, op. cit., p. 315.

Confrontation, the overwhelming attitude of the Government was that Britain should never again get so deeply involved in a protracted counter-insurgency operation.

Perhaps the Government might have been more sympathetic and prepared for another counter-insurgency operation if diplomatic relations between the United Kingdom and Malaysia had not deteriorated. In fact they had deteriorated markedly after the break up of the Malaysian federation but it was only when Confrontation was about to be successfully overcome that both sides began to reveal in public the irritations they had suffered for so long with sealed lips.

The growing tension between Malaysia and Britain became obvious. Britain was accused of negotiating with Indonesia behind Malaysia's back; "Britain has no right to speak for us",[1] the Tunku insisted firmly. He also accused Britain of meddling in Malaysia's affairs, particularly in Sarawak, which on a recent visit had given him the impression that "... it was still a British colony".[2] The accusation of 'interference' was later given its most tangible expression with the enforced withdrawal from Sarawak of the First Secretary to the Deputy High Commission.

The most crucial cause of Anglo-Malaysian antagonism was, though Kuala Lumpur's strong suspicion that the Labour Government sympathised more with Lee Kwan Yew than with the Tunku.[3] This suspicion was hardened by Britain's refusal to increase aid to Malaysia. The Foreign Office's claim that this was solely because of the economic crisis was rudely dismissed, and Kuala Lumpur believed that London was really out to compel her into economic and defence understandings with Singapore.

[1] Reported in The Times, 12th May, 1966, p. 9.

[2] Reported in The Times, 26th September, 1966.

[3] Harold Wilson later claimed that his prompt action in preventing an escalation of the crisis (over the break up of the Federation) between the Tunku and Lee Kwan Yew had possibly saved the latter's life. Wilson, op. cit. p. 177.

The Malaysian Minister for Information said rather uncharitably of the British on 26th June, "The moment Malaysia ceases to be of any importance to them the British will withdraw their help and will leave us alone to fend for ourselves." He went on to contend that there was only a receding chance of a "... lasting friendship with Britain as British help always has strings attached".[1] The Malaysian Finance Minister, moreover, felt it proper to warn the dismayed British Government that Malaysia maintained her foreign currency reserves in sterling 'out of loyalty'[2]: the threat could not have been more obvious.

Yet the British Government also had marked reservations: not only against Malaysia but Singapore also. Both were opposed to S.E.A.T.O.; both had failed to keep Britain informed over the breaking up of the Federation; and Malaysia's intemperate attitude was matched by Singapore which threatened to get the British 'out in twenty-four hours' and to 'cripple the bases'.[3] Finally, Britain had carried single-handedly the burden of Confrontation and yet even then she was placed under severe limitations on her use of the Far Eastern bases.

The 1966 Defence White Paper had speculated about staying in these bases "as long as the Governments of Malaysia and Singapore agree that we should do so", but it added as important qualifications concerning acceptable conditions"[4], which suggested by implication that the British Government was itself by no means able to assess the nature of its relations with Malaysia and Singapore, and was ambivalent in its attitude about how much longer it could sustain a role in the Far East. The British Prime Minister revealed that he was painfully conscious of

[1] Reported in The Times, 27th June, 1966, p. 8.

[2] ibid.

[3] The Policies of Power, op. cit., p. 215.

[4] Defence Review, February, 1966, Cmnd. 2901, p. 8.

the extent to which Anglo-Malaysian relations had reached a terribly low ebb, in an answer given to Duncan Sandys in the House of Commons in late June. Mr. Sandys asked Mr. Wilson what had "happened to bring about such a serious deterioration in our relationship with Malaysia?"[1] The Prime Minister made an expansive response when he said "It is a little unfortunate in view of the actions of successive governments in this country in honouring our commitments to Malaysia on such a scale. Difficulties began to arise last August when Singapore was pushed out of the Malaysian Federation without consultation with us, or prior information being given to us, and I think that once this situation arises there is always a suspicion on the part of one party that we are leaning over in support of the other party. This is part of the difficulty. Also there is the feeling of the Malaysian Government that we should be giving them much more defence aid. But we have to cut our coat very much in accordance with the financial resources that we have available."[2]

Relations between Britain and Malaysia deteriorated still further during Britain's late summer and early autumn. During July Malaysia announced its intention to review its relations with Britain. In August the Tunku said "there might be changes in the conduct of our foreign affairs"[3], and in October Malaysia's Minister of Defence, Tun Abdul Razak, announced that the U.K./Malaysia defence treaty "could be reviewed at any time."[4] The Tunku threatened unilateral action but Wilson warned him that if he were to take action, "it would be unwise for him to show his face at the Commonwealth Conference".[5]

[1] Vol. 730, H. of C., 28th June, 1966, Cols. 1588-9.

[2] ibid.

[3] On a broadcast commemorating independence.

[4] Reported in The Times, 12th October, 1966.

[5] Wilson, op. cit., p. 176.

There was mounting evidence that the Labour Government was astonished at Malaysia's ingratitude. Britain's East of Suez policy had involved over-commitment and a great deal of sacrifice and discomforture for the Government and now it was being dismissed as of no account and curtly informed that Malaysia was about to look again at its relations with the U.K. Moral indignation apart, Kuala Lumpur, however, was not alone in reviewing its foreign defence policies, a similar reassessment was already in process in Whitehall's corridors of power.

It appears in retrospect that it was in July and August 1966 that Britain's foreign and defence policies were radically realigned away from the anglo-American 'special relationship' and 'the open seas' towards a Eurocentric commitment.[1] In an interview on television on 5th March 1970, Mr. Healey looked back at his period as Defence Minister and stressed the tie up between the economic situation and political decision making "Certainly we were under heavy economic pressure. We exaggerated our economic possibility at the beginning. Nevertheless the development of our policy has been consistent in one direction. We always took the view that reductions if they had to come would have to come outside Europe and not inside Europe. We have to make the reductions outside faster and go further than we thought at the beginning".[2] The decisions of July and August 1966 were manifestly the first steps in the process of decision-making which would go 'faster' and 'further' than had hitherto been regarded as necessary or even desirable. But it was clear that the contention contained in the Defence Review that Asia was the area in which there was the greatest danger of serious hostilities was

[1] See Richard, Ivor; Williams, Geoffrey, Europe or the Open Sea? 1970, p.17.

[2] Twenty Four Hours (A BBC television programme), 5th March, 1970.

now being reconsidered.

The events of late 1966 underlined one of the inherent defects of the defence review and that was that although a review plans for the future it draws its conclusions from the past. Indeed, just as the Government got one aspect of defence policy formulated another part was rendered obsolete by events. Although the Defence White Paper had emphasized that it was part of an ongoing process it gave the impression of a definitive statement.[1] Yet by August it had been made substantially irrelevant.

By the end of the year, the Defence Review had lost both its logic and relevance; and although at the declaratory level it was adhered to, no one in government seemed willing to contemplate the next step. At the outset of the review Mr. Healey had imposed upon himself a financial constraint and he rigorously and systematically produced a defence policy which met what he regarded as the proper criteria for meeting existing commitments with less resources. However, by the end of 1966 he was in an impossible position, squeezed between the Treasury and the Foreign Office and not knowing in the short-term what new conditions on policy would be imposed.[2]

The review - which had started as a general prescription which would resolve certain defence contradictions and produce a settled policy - by the end of 1966 was already a profoundly inadequate document largely of national interest. If the Government had a central defence doctrine it had now collapsed under the weight of the unfolding economic crisis. There was pressure in favour of cutting manpower in the forces, of bringing back troops released by the sudden end to Confrontation and demands for

[1] Natural Alliance for the West, op. cit., p. 38.

[2] Denis Healey and the Policies of Power, op. cit., pp. 194-208.

a drastic reduction of the army on the Rhine. And yet the delay in facing these choices led to a total failure to grapple with the need for a radically different defence policy.

This was, though understandable, not excusable. From June to August the Government was perplexed as to whether Confontation was on or off, the Foreign Office confused about its European strategy, while the complex problems of the B.A.O.R. Offset costs dragged on. Of course, the Ministry of Defence found it impossible to make the economies demanded by the Treasury. The Cabinet was in disarray.

Moreover, the Party leadership was confused and divided. The Party Conference as usual was pressing for drastic defence cuts, the P.L.P. somewhat reluctantly impressed by Wilson's rhetoric had accepted Britain's World Role but wanted economies, and Britain's closest ally, the U.S. was bent on keeping Britain to her existing European and overseas roles. The Labour Government faced the acute need to establish its internal and external priorities. This difficult task was to be attempted without a sense of direction or dominating principle or coherent policy in regard to the conduct of the affairs of the nation. Britain strove to retain an independent political status and accept her share of the burden of military stabilisation in areas beyond Europe. But this proved beyond her resources. The logic behind the Defence Review was that appropriate to a great power, and it rested, as Sir Robert Scott argued, upon "the three major components of external policy" which were regarded as inseparable. These included the need to strengthen her economy which could not expand "except in conditions that permit world trade to expand. She cannot hope to bring about these conditions except by an active

political role which she cannot play without accepting its military consequences. Yet she cannot maintain the necessary military support without a healthy economy."[1] These three major components were to require a new policy based upon different principles. Britain's Labour government began to see the need to bring its defence commitments into line with its capabilities.

[1] Scott, Robert, Major Theatre of Conflict, 1968, p. 61.

CHAPTER X

THE DANGERS OF OVER-COMMITMENT AND THE NEED FOR A REDUCED ROLE

The cabinet expected an end to the ambiguity that had disfigured so much of Labour's defence policy during 1966. The events, however, of early 1967 were to destroy this expectation. The February Defence White Paper further obscured the drift of future policy and also failed to convey even the broad future size and shape of the British forces. The document contained so much detail that it added nothing to the broad lines of British Defence policy. Only the need for an annual Defence White Paper according to Parliamentary convention justified its appearance at all. But the Defence White Paper which Mr. Healey had initially prepared caused a stir when it came before the Defence Committee of the Cabinet. It apparently contained a commitment to what Lord Chalfont and Richard Crossman regarded as a doctrine of massive retaliation which NATO had formally disavowed. Mr. Crossman in his dictated impressions of this meeting is quite explicit. "I'd already been warned by my talk with Lord Chalfront about what might be found in the White Paper this year. The second part of it, as usual, was a mass of figures and details. What really matters is always the first chapter, which only arrived on Friday evening. It contained a flaming apologia for Britain's role in NATO as the chief apostle of a return to massive nuclear retaliation. When I'd finished it I thought to myself: Oh God, have I got to go and have another row with Harold on Monday? Have I got to be the only one to raise this in O.P.D.

It so happened that I didn't have to because George Brown arrived in time to say exactly what I'd intended to say. He told the Committee

that he didn't want to challenge the doctrine or the strategy but he did ask himself why on earth we should have to put it forward in this form this year. Would it not profoundly shock the Germans, not to mention Kosygin, who arrives this week? Would it not be the cause of a frightful row in the Party? Something which Healey had included in his initial remarks suggested that his officials had not wanted this first chapter and that he'd written it himself. George Brown ended with a bitter complaint that he'd only received this on Friday afternoon and that Thomson and Chalfont, his two Ministers of State, saw it for the first time on Sunday. Surely we had a rule about O.D.P. being given decent time to discuss something as important as this? Healey made no effort to answer this question though he did not in any way deny that he himself had written the offending first chapter. Nor do I know whether Healey had warned the P.M. about the character of this chapter. I rather fancy from Harold's behaviour that he wasn't given much warning and that Healey was once again acting as a lone wolf pushing his own ideas in his own peculiar style. George Brown was supported by George Wigg and then by me from rather different points of view and, of course, by the Chancellor. The Committee was virtually unanimous that this chapter of the White Paper was a quite unnecessary provocation.

In addition to our objections to the exposition of nuclear strategy I pointed out that there was another reason why the chapter should be wholly deleted. It gave advance notice of further major cuts. But surely it was unwise to commit ourselves to these now. Harold replied that what was much more serious was that if we didn't announce the cuts now and then made them in July, we would be accused of surrendering to our own left-wingers."

[1] Crossman, op. cit. p. 215.

In fact the White Paper's only real significance was that it quantified the plans outlined the previous year. Gurkha strength was to be cut by 5,000 and the total reduction in the Far East by the end of 1967 was expected to be between 18,000 and 23,000. There were to be other reductions. These were announced by Mr. Healey in the House. "As a result of the redeployment from Aden we shall have about 10,000 additional men home from the Middle East by the end of the next financial year, after allowing for the small new build up in the Gulf. Another 5,000 men will be coming home from Cyprus, Malta and elsewhere, including S. Africa and the Caribbean. In all, as the White Paper makes clear, we now have firm plans for returning a minimum of 25,000 men to Britain from outside Europe, excluding the base units in Singapore and the Gurkha rundown..."[1] And yet if the Defence White Paper lacked a central organizing principle it could be excused to some extent, because the Government was struggling to think through the events of late 1966 and to discuss them with its allies. There was also monumental anxiety about the economy. Mr. Healey needed to get his sums right. All these factors compelled the Defence Minister to keep his options open.

Nevertheless, the White Paper and the subsequent defence debate were characterized by what they omitted. Interestingly enough, while the importance and success of the Confrontation operation were recognised in the White Paper, there were not the strong and emphatic endorsements of the East of Suez role which had always been an integral part of defence debates. The Government was beginning to articulate a different posture.

Mr. Healey projected these doubts when he pontificated about the

[1] Vol. 742, H. of C., 27th February, 1967, Col. 105.

importance of deciding "... on the type of military backing..."[1] now required East of Suez, as though a new strategy might be in the making. The White Paper, too announced that "... the foreign exchange problem has .... compelled the Government to re-examine the political, economic and military implications of our deployment outside Europe".[1]

The Foreign Secretary added his own uncertainties about the role. "I do not argue" said Mr. Brown, "that we have to go on spending in the future £2,000 million a year; nor that we can afford to ... I do not say that we have always got to have troops where we have got them now, or in the numbers we have got them now. We must constantly search for other and better ways to do the job."[2] Mr. Brown stressed on yet another occasion that the problem with the East of Suez role lay in "... finding a way which we can stay in a reduced ... form". He also argued that "In other cases, the decision to withdraw completely can and must be taken."[3]

The Government's position, though still undefined and obscure, was now arguably gaining a new dimension. There was now almost total consensus that a pull-out from East of Suez should be the general objective of policy. The problem was not whether to disengage but how to achieve it in a way least damaging to allies. The approach adopted was to continue in low-profile a role East of Suez for that period of time to give "... diplomacy a chance to construct a different basis for the security of the countries which we are leaving."[4]

As the Government slowly defined its policy, which involved a reduction in Britain's presence overseas, the difference between those

[1] Defence White Paper, February, 1967, Cmnd. 3203., p.3.

[2] Vol. 742, H. of C., 28th February, 1967, Col. 290.

[3] Vol. 742, H. of C., 28th February, 1967, Col. 283.

[4] Vol. 742, H. of C., 28th February, 1967, Col. 395.

anxious to stay or withdraw from East of Suez groups became less central. Mr. Healey, to reinforce the point, speculated freely about, "... tackling the problem ... of reductions in our base facilities in Singapore".[1] He admitted "... some sympathy .." with Mr. Mayhew's strictures that the World Role was "... becoming an increasingly doubtful and dangerous proposition" and that it made "... nonsense of the Government's policy in Europe".[2] He even conceded that Mr. Heffer's contention that British forces may constitute a "provocation ..."[3] was of great weight and he allowed himself the admission that the East of Suez role was now 'controversial'. Richard Crossman angrily noted in his diary that "It's obvious that Whitehall wants what George Brown Denis Healey and Harold Wilson want. They're all going for a compromise under which we slowly get off the mainland and out of Singapore in the next ten years to build up a military presence in Australia. It's a barmy compromise. We ought to stay on the mainland or to withdraw from East of Suez altogether."[4] The February Defence White Paper and the debate on it in the House of Commons, then clearly indicated that it was likely that Britain would no longer remain East of Suez on an indefinite basis and that, even if she decided to stay, it would be on a greatly reduced capability.

A reduced role, of course, had been broadly established in the 1966 Defence White Paper, but it was not until the collapse of Confrontation that the Government had the will to contemplate just what a reduced presence would involve. Only in February 1967 did it become

[1] Vol. 742, H. of C., 27th February, 1967, Col. 103.

[2] Vol. 742, H. of C., 18th February, 1967, Col. 409.

[3] See Vol. 739, H. of C., 18th January, 1967, Col. 404.

[4] Crossman, op. cit., p. 313.

feasible to cast doubt on the assumption that the East of Suez role was a strategic necessity for Britain. It was over a period of five months that M.P.s on both sides of the House began to question the relevance of Britain's global deployment.

The Defence Minister shaped the questions which helped to condition the process of re-thinking: "... what sort of things does it make sense economically and politically for us to do" he asked, "... for how long under what conditions, and with what sort of forces? ... how should we disengage from the position that it does not make sense to keep? Over what period should we run down our forces? What political arrangements can we make for the security of those who were previously dependent on us? And what economic arrangements can we make to cushion them against the loss of foreign exchange that we save by going?"[1] With questions like these, strategic issues which dominated discussions over the next few months, with the leaders of the United States, Australia, New Zealand, Malaysia and Singapore, seeking answers were to lead to the decision in July to withdraw from the Far East by the mid 1970s.[2]

The July Defence White Paper was indeed an 'historic document.' This was certainly evident. The document reflected a fundamental shift in both Britain's foreign and defence policies. The forces in Singapore and Malaysia were to be cut by about one half by 1970-1, and withdrawn altogether by the middle of the 1970s.[3] The forces assigned to S.E.A.T.O.

1 Vol. 742, H. of C., 27th February, 1967, Cols. 115-6.

2 Crossman complained in his diary that the official briefing of Ministers on the Defence Committee of the Cabinet was grossly inadequate. "I now feel sure that the officials don't reveal any of the important facts to a Committee as big as O.P.D." Earlier he had described the official document as "the most appalling guff, not a serious strategic analysis ...." Crossman, op. cit., p. 397.

3 Vol. 742, H of C, 27th February, 1967, op. cit
In July 1967 the total number of men and women working in or for the services in Singapore and Malaysia was roughly 80,000. It was expected that this would drop by April 1968 to 70,000. Between April 1968 and 1970-1 the numbers were expected to drop by a further 30,000. This would leave a total of 40,000, half of which would be civilian.

were to be re-shaped 'in nature and size' and there were to be 'consultations' on the Anglo-Malaysian Defence Agreement. One brigade of the B.A.O.R. and one squadron of R.A.F. Germany were to be redeployed in the U.K., and the overall cut in the force strengths was to total 37,000 by 1971 and about 75,000 by the mid 1970s.[1]

The nature and extent of these cuts, however, did not completely diminish the Far East role. Britain was "... to maintain a military capacity for use, if required, in the area, even when we no longer have forces permanently based there".[2] Exactly what this 'capacity' would involve was unspecified, but it was certain to centre upon a strategic reserve in the United Kingdom and a naval and amphibious force in the Far East.[3] In addition, aircraft would be stationed at Bahrain, Masirah, Gan and the Cocos Islands, and possibly after 1975 in Australia.[4] In fact the Government's redeployment was designed to provide the back-up support that Malaysia and Singapore were unable to provide for themselves.

The July measures were the outcome of the interelationship of economic and political and strategic factors which militated against the East of Suez role throughout the spring months of 1967. While it was clear that no overt economic crisis existed, that the position was not as frankly bad as the previous summer, it was still clear that Britain's secular economic decline was now irreversible. Britain's economic crises in March and July of successive years were depressingly inevitable and saving the pound became a twice yearly ritual. In the months leading up to July the Government appeared outwardly nervous and edgy, waiting for

[1] There was also to be a reduction of civilians, both U.K. and local, of 80,000 by 1975, Vol. 742, H of C, 27th February, 1967, op. cit.

[2] Supplementary statement on Defence policy, July, 1967, Cmnd. 3357, p.6.

[3] See ibid.

[4] See Healey, Vol. 751, H. of C., 27th July, 1967, Cols. 997-8.

the storm clouds to break.

At the beginning of the year, however, it seemed that the economic situation was improving. The balance of payments figures for 1966 had picked up and the improvement continued into the first quarter of 1967. The wage freeze pressed into a period of severe and painful restraint in January, bank rate was lowered to 6½% in the same months and there were record export figures for February.

However, there were some disturbing trends. At the end of 1966 Britain was more acutely in debt than ever before and unemployment in January 1967 exceeded 600,000. On 5th June, the Arab-Israelie war sprang into full and sudden venom, the Suez canal was quickly closed and an oil embargo on the United Kingdom was introduced by the enraged Arabs who also threatened to withdraw their sterling balances from London. It was thus in a confused and menacing atmosphere of growing crisis that the Labour Government contemplated new economic and defence policies.

By the Spring of 1967 it was becoming clear that the Government wanted to reflate the economy. The British people were bracing themselves for a continued wage freeze, tough deflationary packages and the disheartening burden of unemployment. In addition, Party morale was desperate. The budget in April was not particularly hard, but the Treasury felt confident that a balance of payments surplus for 1967 of £200 million could be achieved. The Government's concern for Britain's trading position slightly diminished and they could now concentrate on getting the home economy moving again. On 7th June, just two days after the imposition of an oil embargo on Britain by the Arabs, the Government somewhat unexpectedly eased the H.P. restrictions on cars.

Early summer was hardly a propitious moment to reflate. Confidence in sterling was low, Britain was just about to terminate the severe restraint and the trade figures for the second quarter of the year were cruelly disappointing. There was the risk of money being attracted away from Britain by spectacularly good American interest rates and the pound was once again vulnerable because of the Middle East war. Nevertheless, the Chancellor was determined that Labour should achieve a 3% growth rate and his Treasury advisors encouraged him to allow a temporary run on the pound.

Defence cuts were inextricably bound up with Labour's new economic strategy. Mr. Crossman was of the opinion that "We shall not be able to get a restoration of the growth rate or indeed pay for major social reform without a massive cut-back in defence."[1] His diaries confirm his conviction that defence cut-backs were now desirable and inevitable. A majority of the Cabinet pinned their hopes for recovery more specifically on a withdrawal from the Far East. The view now gaining momentum was that a military presence was a costly and inappropriate way of protecting economic interests, that Britain's investments in the Far East were declining in magnitude anyway, and that the United States interest in Britain's economic well being would be sustained even if she abandoned her Far Eastern role. Crossman noted as early as April 11th that at least six members of the Cabinet "felt we should maintain our military presence in the Far East and shouldn't take any drastic cuts or try to get off the mainland by 1975. Everbody else felt equally strongly that the cuts were not radical enough. This view was best expressed by Roy Jenkins, who put the Foreign Secretary in a very difficult position.

[1] cited New Statesman, Vol. 73, 16th June, 1967, p. 856.

As George pointed out, he would now be going to Washington to negotiate knowing that a majority of the Cabinet wanted no military presence in the Far East at all and were determined not only to get off the mainland but to withdraw our naval and air forces from anywhere East of Suez. How was he to negotiate with our allies, he plaintively asked, in terms of a slow orderly process of withdrawal when most of the Cabinet wanted a drastic revision of policy next July?"[1]

It was the anxieties about the foreign exchange loss that the Government was most consious of, since this was an aspect of defence spending which directly affected the balance of payments. Indeed two years earlier on 8th November 1965, after the usual financial difficulties on the exchange markets, Mr. Callaghan had said "... there would not have been a sterling crisis if we did not have to bear so much of the burden of defence abroad".[2] Mr. Callaghan was still the major influence in the Treasury or even perhaps the Minister most able to reflect his views on the burden of overseas defence expenditure which had long been voiced in Whitehall.[3] The belief that the overseas burden was an unacceptable price to pay for imperial influence gained in credibility.

By July 1967 the Government in fact, was rejoicing about the marked cut in foreign exchange costs that it had made. Mr. Healey expressed his satisfaction concerning the extent of the Government's achievement; "... our total stationing costs on defence this year are only £184 million compared with about £250 million in the last year of the previous Government - a reduction of more than one quarter. And we shall have

[1] Crossman, op. cit., p. 308.

[2] Der Spiegel, 8th November, 1965.

[3] See D. C. Watt, Decisions to Withdraw from the Gulf, Political Quarterly, Vol. 39, 1968, p. 310.

reduced this net total by two thirds in the middle of the 1970s. Our foreign stationing costs will then be only a quarter of what they were when we assumed office".[1]

But the spinsterish tone of the *Economist* was by no means as enthusiastic. "The cuts to be made in the three years after the current financial year will save about £32 million a year in foreign exchange. That is half of one per cent of Britain's import bill. The second round of cuts, between 1971 and the middle of the 1970s, is even less relevant".[2] The *Spectator* somewhat sourly agreed with the *Economist*, calling the proposed cuts "pious hopes", and "... irrelevant to Britain's immediate balance of payments problem".[3] In addition, the real savings were almost certainly less that the Government admitted. Not only did foreign based troops generate exports and those redeployed at home increase the import bill, but the Government had reiterated its commitment to its Far Eastern allies that far-reaching economic aid would be available when Britain finally withdrew from the bases.

Clearly the decision to withdraw from the Far East by the mid-1970s could not be attributed to the need to save foreign currency. And yet this reason for the defence cuts was emphasized with such warmth and conviction by almost all the leading Labour cabinet ministers, that it became a self-fulfilling prophecy and therefore an important factor in the calculations of the Cabinet. But it was asserted by a critic of the government's approach that "Britain is in danger of

[1] The net foreign exchange cost of Britain's overseas role for 1964-67 inclusive was £237 million, £254 million and £239 million. See Healey,D. Vol. 762, H. of C., 2nd April, 1968, Col. 77. Local expenditure in Malaysia and Singapore in 1966-7 was estimated at £80 million. Singapore accounted for £55 million. See Healey, D., Vol. 755, H. of C., 4th December 1967, Col. 233.

[2] Economist, Vol. 224, 22nd July 1967, p.293.

[3] Spectator, Vol. 219, 21st July, 1967, p.66.

incurring serious political sacrifices and of neglecting humanitarian obligations for the sake of some small financial economies. It is time, perhaps, to recover our sense of proportion."[1] Yet there was certainly an urgent need for the Government to emphasize its determination to correct the balance of payments situation effectively and as quickly as possible. The beneficial effect of the defence cuts in themselves were not all that significant or immediate. But the Government regarded these savings in foreign exchange important; at different times they were heralded as 'drastic', 'dramatic', 'vital', 'essential' and as "... a great contribution to improving our balance of payments".[2]

The real economic explanation for the decision to withdraw from the Far East was the imperative need to cut the overall budgetary cost of defence. The Government had, of course, pledged itself in 1964 to cut defence spending to £2000 million or 6% of G.N.P. by 1969-70, on the rather simplistic assumption that these estimates were the same. In fact, by 1967, according to the July Defence White Paper, the defence bill in 1969-70 was likely to be in excess of £2000 million and consequently not very far short of 7% of the G.N.P.[3]

The July measures however ensured that by 1970-1, defence costs would be down to £1900 million and by the mid 1970s to £1800 million.[1] On the rather sanguine assumption of a three per cent annual growth rate, defence, in 1975, would account for only 5% of G.N.P. and in 1970-71 for 5.9% of G.N.P. This was precisely what Labour had forecast in 1964.

[1] Thomas Wilson, "What can we afford?", op. cit.

[2] Labour Party Talking Points, No. 12, 1967, p. 10.

[3] "... partly as a result of the ever growing cost of modern equipment, the defence budget from 1970-1 onwards was unlikely to be below £2,100 million". Supplementary statement on Defence Policy, July, 1967, Cmnd. 3357, p.11.

[4] Mr. Healey compared the cost of Labour's defence plans with that of the Conservatives. "The changes we have made in the programme we inherited from the Conservatives have already saved the tax payer over £750 million during the last 3 years alone. The further savings announced.. will raise the rate' of saving on Tory plans to £500 million a year in 1971 and something like £800 million a year in the middle 1970s." Vol. 751, H. of C., 27th July 1967 Col.1009

Of course, though, in 1964 it had not forseen a withdrawal from the Far East, a cut-back in NATO, and a massive overall reduction in Britain's armed forces.

It was clear that to achieve this kind of saving the cut-back would fall on the Far Eastern bases, since there was little scope for a massive reduction in Europe. "... it is not possible, explained Mr. Healey, "to envisage a substantial reduction in NATO's present forces without either a major change in NATO's strategy or some progress toward agreement for reciprocal reductions on both sides of the Iron Curtain".[1]

Mr. Healey was also painfully aware that a major saving could only be made if the Singapore base were abandoned and not just reduced. "When we looked beyond 1970", said the Defence Minister, "it emerged that, once our presence in the Far East is reduced, the sort of base facilities we maintain at present on the Asian mainland become very bad value for money indeed".[2] In addition Mr. Healey was concerned that Britain, in the next few years, could invest a great deal of resources on an East of Suez capability on the assumption that it purchased Britain diplomatic influence, and then be faced with the prospect that indigenous governments could decide that the British were no longer needed or welcome.

In the Government's estimate, then, there were powerful economic reasons for its projected withdrawal from the Far Eastern bases. It was clear to the Cabinet that budgetary savings would now be possible. Mr. Healey voiced their enthusiasm. "This is a massive contribution

[1] Vol. 751, H. of C., 27th July, 1967, Cols. 988-9.

[2] Vol. 751, H. of C., 27th July, 1967, Col. 990

to strengthening our national economy and making valuable resources available for other purposes",[1] claimed Mr. Healey. And Mr. Wilson, in the same debate, once more reminded the House that "... the strength of a nation's defence can never be greater than the strength of its economic base ..."[2]

Labour's leading Ministers also were aware of internal party pressures. And these pressures were of growing importance in determining the nature of the impending defence cuts. The *Economist* was in no doubt as to why defence cuts had become necessary. Mr. Wilson has decided that he cannot face the Labour Party Conference at Scarborough in October without making a major concession to his critics in the Party". And then more pertinently, "Mr. Wilson has made a calculation of a sort, but it is nothing to do with foreign policy and is only indirectly about economic policy."[3] The *New Statesman* agreed that the "...defence cuts ... are conveniently timed to take the edge off criticism of the Government at the party conference."[4] Though a Party Conference cannot bind a Labour Government to a particular policy it can and does shape the general character of future policies.

The Prime Minister faced the need to introduce defence cuts as back-bench pressures increased in favour of a further down-grading of strategic interests. The hope of achieving a strong economy within which to build a more socially just society had already been compromised. Under the impact of wage freezes and restrictive

[1] Vol. 751, H. of C., 27th July, 1967, Col. 1004.

[2] Vol. 751, H. of C., 27th July, 1967, Col. 1110.

[3] Economist, Vol. 224, 22nd July, 1967, p. 293.

[4] New Statesman, Vol. 74, July, 1967, p. 69.

incomes policies the fiercely loyal back-bencher had had to endure the humiliating retreat from election promises which the economic situation now demanded. The Party activists both inside and outside Parliament had not even the satisfaction of knowing that the Government was gaining in popularity. Labour indeed in 1967 suffered total humiliation at the Greater London elections, and in the provinces was in control of only three county councils out of fifty-eight. The Left-wing of the party in the shape of the Tribune Group were not slow to emphasize that the pursuit of more socialist policies could perhaps save the day and might make the Party more popular. The Left-Right division within the party also rested upon that unproven proposition. The Government now wanted to enter the E.E.C. This dramatic decision was a further cause of dissension and confusion within Labour's ranks. Mr. Wilson had told a Swansea audience, "never has our influence been weaker than when a conservative government, bankrupt of ideas for regenerating our economy, looked to the Common Market to solve all our economic problems."[1] It was manifestly obvious how relevant this statement now was in 1967. But the Party's disillusionment was revealed with the enforced resignation of six parliamentary private secretaries over the Common Market issue. The Government was just beginning a desperate struggle to survive. Defence spending was certain to suffer further cuts.

Even before the July measures were announced, the Left-Wing Tribune group were issuing warnings to the Government. Mr. Allaun reminded Mr. Healey that leaving the "... Far East by 1975 will not satisfy the

[1] cited Spectator, Vol. 219, 14th July, 1967, p. 39, referring to a speech by Mr. Wilson on 25th January 1964.

Labour Party Conference, which has plans to leave five years earlier".[1] It was also clear that the February Defence White Paper had upset the susceptibilities of sixty three Labour M.P.s sufficiently for them to abstain - ".... a warning no Government could possibly ignore".[2] On that occasion the Prime Minister, with the help of some particularly strong language, had temporarily disciplined the rebels; but he had also incensed them into a state of shock and fragile unity which could not and did not last. Indeed, it was the Party's right-wing establishment which revealed alarming signs of disarray. Mr. Shinwell, the chairman of the P.L.P., after a stormy and embarrassingly open conflict with the leader of the House (Mr. Crossman) and the Chief Whip (Mr. Silkin), finally resigned, claiming that the persistent defence rebels should have been dealt with more severely. Mr. Crossman noted this episode for his forthcoming diaries and emphasized just how bitter the argument had become.[3]

Soon after, in late July, came the resignation of the loyal if pedestrian Miss Margaret Herbison. The *New Statesman's* reaction captured the feeling of stunned regret which was widely voiced ' "The church can as readily lose a bishop as a Labour Government its Minister of Social Security."[4] Miss Herbison's resignation gave further articulation to the growing tension between the irreconcilable claims of the social services and defence. It was clear evidence too of the confusion of moral purpose within the Party, signifying a crisis of values and of ideology.

In this critical first six months of 1967 the Government was aware

[1] Vol. 749, H. of C., 5th July, 1967, Col. 1789, Oral answers.

[2] New Statesman, Vol. 73, 10th March, 1967, p. 313.

[3] Crossman, op. cit. p. 584.

[4] New Statesman, op. cit.

that opposition to the East of Suez role would not easily be overcome. It was no temporary obsession of a small minority in the Party that could be covertly disregarded. It had none of the weaknesses of an issue trumpeted by the Left alone, but clearly had the strength and attractiveness of an issue which cuts across party divisions. Clearly, then, there was some evidence in this period of Government appeasement; that economic reflation (slap in the middle of an Arab-Israeli war which was certain to adversely affect Britain's balance of payments) and defence cuts were the sacrifical lambs that Mr. Wilson was prepared to offer to the highly politicized party conference.

Also relevant was the Government's bold and unexpected European initiative. Although the Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary had not exactly succeeded on their 'probing' mission of the Continent, indeed not, their overwhelming determination to go forward encouraged them to make a formal application to join the E.E.C.[1] Mr. Wilson admitted that this decision, taken on 4th May, was likely to have a marked impact on Labour's future defence priorities.

However, it should be noted that the move towards closer relations with Europe in Labour's thinking should have been an important factor in the decision to withdraw from East of Suez, but in fact it was not. Patrick Gordon Walker later expressed this view "... the two things were not directly or intellectually related. Each policy was being separately considered in the Cabinet."[2] Nevertheless the Government disingenuously linked the two. Moreover, the July Defence White Paper argued that Britain's contribution to NATO would "... become

[1] In My Way, op. cit.

[2] Gordon Walker, P. The Cabinet, 1970, p. 128.

even more important as we develop closer political ties between Britain and her European neighbours".[3] Even the *New Statesman*, which had not hitherto been known for its pro-European propensities, advised the Government to end its "... military fantasies East of Suez...", and in so doing go "... half way to meet ..." French demands.[1]

It is not easy to see to what extent the European strategy influenced Labour's defence policy. But it was certainly of less significance than the Government admitted. It was tempting for the Government to attach great weight to the Eurocentric strategy, simply because it was less odious than having to articulate the withdrawal decisions in terms of economic decline or mismanagement or intra-party fragmentation.

Yet interestingly enough the East of Suez role was the central factor in at least two of De Gaulle's reservations concerning British entry into the European Community. The 'special relationship' and national economic decline were linked to Britain's East of Suez role. There was thus some point in the British Government's attempt to emphasize the fact that the pull-out from the Far East by the mid 1970s could give a certain rationale to Britain's new European strategy.

Mr. Healey was clearly aware of the political arguments for a withdrawal from East of Suez, but was more probably conscious at this time of the strategic significance of a European strategy. Certainly he found it a congenial argument.

It would be wrong to conclude that out of the blue in July 1967 the British Government constructed a new strategic edifice and in

[1] New Statesman, Vol. 73, 3rd March, 1967, p. 277.

and in effect rejected the strategic case for the East of Suez role. This interpretation runs counter to the Government's strong statements about withdrawal being "... the surest prescription for a nuclear holocaust..."[1], and about the Confrontation operation having averted a collapse into 'international anarchy', having stood in the way of 'competitive intervention' and having reduced escalation and the 'risk of general war'. And yet there were growing signs that the Government's assessment of the East of Suez role was beginning to change.

This process of reassessment was not solely due to the domestic events of the weeks immediately prior to the July measures. According to the *New Statesman* it was only on the Foreign Office's insistence that the Cabinet had agreed to excise from the February Defence White Paper "... a passage foreshadowing a withdrawal from Singapore".[2] Certainly the Crossman diaries indicate that there were deeply felt and long-standing arguments that determined the withdrawal decision when it finally came in July.[3] The biggest argument related to the general problem of the shape and size and indeed purpose of the Western presence in South East Asia.

Although the British Government had loyally and strongly supported United States' intervention in Vietnam, it was clear that the Cabinet had strong moral, political and strategic reservations about the policy. In addition, although the Government had never displayed overt enthusiasm for construing the British presence in the Far East as a contribution to international security or as part of a general western

[1] See Wilson's famous June 15th speech of 1966 for example.

[2] New Statesman, Vol. 73, 17th March, 1967, p. 356.

[3] Crossman, op. cit.

policy of containment, it was clear that Britain's East of Suez role could not be seen in isolation from American action in South East Asia.[1] There would obviously have been diplomatic repercussions abroad, as well as pressure from the Left if the British Government had represented its overseas presence as supportive of America. A statement by Patrick Gordon Walker, however, underlined that the British Government did in fact connect the two roles. "The consequences of American defeat or humiliation in South Vietnam would be a direct Chinese threat not only to the other Indo-Chinese states but to India and Malaysia".[2] It followed that once American policy began to change in the face of unsuccessful war, Britain's position on the Asian mainland might also become incredible. This aspect of a volatile strategic relationship was certainly a factor in the July decision. Indeed, Mr. Healey indicated that this was so in a speech to the House. "The United States has publicly announced that, once the Vietnam war is over, it wants no bases in Asia and is prepared to leave Vietnam ... we too, must aim at a situation in which the local peoples can live at peace without the presence of external forces."[3]

More evidence of the Government's growing doubts about the Western presence in the Far East were articulated by the Defence Minister after a lengthy and controversial speech by Mr. Mayhew. In that speech Mr. Mayhew made the relevant point that there was a tendency to exaggerate the threat of Chinese aggression in South East Asia. He said that in fact "... the Chinese are most militant where

[1] See P.G. Walker, Has the West a Place in Asia? from a BBC Third Programme, August, 1965, printed in Survival, Vol. VII, No. 8, November, 1965, p. 303.

[2] Gordon Walker, op. cit.

[3] Vol. 751, H. of C., 27th July, 1967, Col. 991.

the Western powers are most obstrusive"[1], and that the West was not disposed to allocate sufficient resources to contain China anyway. Mr. Healey's interjection in that speech may merely have been in line with parliamentary etiquette rather than indicating a basic change in attitude by the Government. But Mr. Healey's remark "I follow my Hon. friend's argument and agree with a great deal of it."[2] was surprisingly frank. It was evidence that the Government too was fully aware of the relevance of the sophisticated and informed strategic analysis of the Western presence now emerging from those advocating a European strategy and the cause of Europeanism in general.

It was, however, the actual and particular dangers of Britain's exposed position East of Suez that arounsed anxieties for Mr. Healey. These now unaccpetable dangers had become manifest during the Confrontation with Indonesia. The Government's resolve had been to contend that Britain would never again get enmeshed in such an operation; but it was a doctrine easy to assert, it was quite another matter to ensure that British military power did not get drawn into operations that could escalate from a more physical presence to participation in a major conflict. Mr. Healey was resolved that this risk of uncontrolled escalation should not be repeated.

Britain's exposed military position exacerbated by the Government's controversial decisions not to build a new aircraft carrier and to drastically curtail the force levels in the Far East. In addition, Mr. Healey announced on 5th July, just before the publication of the Defence White Paper, that the A.F.V.G. project, 'the core' of

[1] Vol. 742, H. of C., 28th February, 1967, Col. 346.

[2] Vol. 742, H. of C., 28th February, 1967, Col. 347.

Britain's long term aircraft programme, had rather dramatically collapsed. This implied that Britain might be in the absurd position where she had enough strength "... to provoke without enough to deter..."[1]. Mr. Healey was acutely aware of this risk for he admitted that "one of the most difficult questions of judgement for any government is to decide whether the presence of British forces .... is acting as an irritant in the local political situation...".[2] Moreover, it was likely that this diminished military capability could invite an unwelcome challenge. And should this challenge materialize then there was also the problem that if British forces needed rapid back-up, the Government would be forced to grapple with problems of overflying rights, of acclimatisation of troops and of the prohibitive costs of greater mobility. The proper strategy was to avoid further commitment. In the Government's calculation, though, disengagement could never be easily accomplished while Britain had forces on the ground in the Far East. There had to be a greater reliance on indigenous efforts.

The Prime Minister was indeed adamant; "... the provision of ground troops must be more and more their (Singapore and Malaysia's) responsibility, it is unrealistic to suggest in this day and age that it shold be the role of Britain to provide the ground troops in these areas...".[3] Mr. Healey later emphasized eagerly that Britain "... had forty thousand men in Singapore and Malaysia before confrontation. It didn't stop confrontation but it forced us to send another fifteen thousand out there".[4]

[1] Mayhew, C. Vol. 742, H. of C., 28th February, 1967, Col. 347.

[2] Address by Mr. Healey to the Royal Commonwealth Secretary, London, 10th May, 1967.

[3] Vol. 751, H. of C., 27th July, 1967, Col. 1107.

[4] Twenty Four Hours (A BBC television programme) 5th March 1970.

It was during the same television programme that Mr. Healey explained what the Government considered to be the essential difference between the Conservative policy of retaining the bases and Labour's policy of extending help to allies with its mobile amphibious forces. "The great difference is that under our policy we denegotiate from the commitments which compel us to intervene, whether it makes sense or not .... our policy leaves us free to choose in the light of all the circumstances at the time. The Conservative policy commits them automatically to intervene".[1] It was this dread of uncontrolled escalation that was the central strategic rationale behind the decisions of July 1967. The war in Vietnam cast a long shadow.[2] Confrontation could have proved to have been Britain's Vietnam.

Mr. Healey articulated a policy which favoured a more peripheral role based on a naval and air presence which would be less open to political pressure. It could prove less provocative, even perhaps, less inflexible, and more significantly less of a commitment if Britain could deter from a distance, from the safety of her aircraft and naval vessels.

As Mr. Healey presented his analysis of Britain's intermediate role in strategic terms. It was clear that he was as yet only concerned with the military and not the political problem that if Britain could not risk a major battle East of Suez she should avoid a position where she might be compelled to take part in one. The Service Chiefs were not inclined to argue. The military were acutely aware of the dangers of over-commitment.

For a number of years the real danger had been that Britain actually

[1] ibid.

[2] The Permanent Alliance, op. cit., p. 213.

continued her East of Suez role because she had the necessary capability. But by July 1967 the opposite now applied. Britain's East of Suez capability was now so inadequate that the imperial oceanic role was considered beyond her resources. Mr. Mayhew voiced the fear that the Government were "... seeking to dispose of their commitments not by negotiation and diplomacy, but simply by making ourself incapable of carrying them out".[1]

While the over-stretch of British troops in the Far East was the most compelling strategic argument for the July measures there were others. The explanation which the Government understandably advanced was that Britain's local allies were incomparably stronger than in the days of confrontation. The Defence White Paper announced that the military strength of Britain's "... friends and allies was growing"; Mr. Healey argued that "Both Malaysia and Singapore are building up their own land forces" and added that "The only threat which our Commonwealth partners do not feel confidence in dealing with themselves by 1970 is the potential threat by air and sea".[2] Moreover, even if Britain's allies were suddenly threatened it was now possible, claimed the White Paper, "... to move forces across the world faster and in larger numbers than was possible even a few years ago".[3]

Apart from the provision of increased mobility and of improved allied strength locally, the actual strategic changes which justified a withdrawal from the Far East were far from clear. The Foreign Secretary rather airily spoke about "... the happier atmosphere in South East Asia..."[4] and the Defence White Paper even more vaguely speculated

[1] Vol. 751, H. of C., 27th July, 1967, Col. 1070.

[2] Vol. 751, H. of C., 27th July, 1967, Cols. 989-90.

[3] Supplementary statement on Defence Policy, July 1967, Cmnd. 3357, p. 4.

[4] Vol. 750, H. of C., 20th July, 1967, Col. 2498.

about the changing "... power and policy of our potential enemies..."[1] But it is clear though that none of these factors were really significant; they were in fact rather more in the nature of post hoc rationalisations. As we have seen, the real explanation for withdrawal lay in considerations rather more complex and even less explicable in terms of the application of rational strategic calculation. The arguments used to justify a withdrawal from the Far East were not however applied to the Persian Gulf. This was indeed rather curious. Denis Healey wanted to evacuate all the Middle Eastern bases, as part of his defence review. It was apparent that only the Foreign Office had prevented the Cabinet from taking the decision to withdraw from the Persian Gulf.

In attempting an explanation as to why the Government had omitted from the July measures any plan to withdraw from the Gulf, the Foreign Secretary propounded a somewhat familiar thesis but one that was now bereft of meaning. "Our forces" said Mr. Brown, "Are not in the Persian Gulf simply to protect our oil interests as such, but to maintain stability in the area. Many of the countries in the Gulf have unresolved territorial claims on each other .... if we were to pull out at once we could only expect these old claims to come to the surface and the stability of the Gulf would thereby be put at risk".[2]

The same argument, however, could be applied to the Far East. This strategic argument was a poor justification for staying in the Gulf while at the same time Britain was erecting a strategic argument for quitting South-East Asia. Of course the real consideration was that the Gulf role was not as costly as the South-East Asian commitment. And

[1] Supplementary Statement on Defence Policy, July 1967, Cmnd. 3357.

[2] Vol. 750, H. of C., 29th July, 1967, Coo. 2494.

clearly the Gulf states were not as ready to provide for their own security as Malaysia and Singapore, but nor would they ever be if Britain remained in the area.

However, What really concerned the Government about the Gulf was that it was manifestly an area in which war was an immediate prospect or an endemic fear. The July measures were formulated at roughly the same time as the June War sprang into full fury in the Middle East, and this had some affect on the Defence White Paper. On 19th June the Government solemnly announced that it would retain a naval capability in Southern Arabian waters for six months after the Britsh withdrawal from Aden and would also extend the V-bomber cover for an unspecified period. A month later Mr. Brown explained to the House that "... in the present disturbed situation in the Middle East we must be particularly concerned about the stability and security of the Gulf area..."[1]. The Government was responding in an ad hoc fashion to a growingly volatile situation which could pre-empt the very decisions that the government was eager to make.

Mr. Healey made a similar point: "... we are right not to attempt to fix, still less announce a date for withdrawal from our positions in the Persian Gulf. At the moment, we are making a vital contribution towards the stability in the Gulf, a contribution welcomed by the local states who are not yet in agreement on how to handle the situation if and when we should withdraw".[2] Again, when pressed on Britain's role the Defence Minister replied "We shall continue to fulfil our obligations in this area, so long as the need is there, this is clearly not the

[1] Vol. 750, H. of C., 20th July, 1967, Col. 1494.

[2] Vol. 751, H. of C., 27th July, 1967, Col. 993.

time to make predications on how long this will be".[1] Indeed not.

Nevertheless, it did seem obvious that Britain would not stay in the Gulf for much longer. The consequences of the Arab Israeli war were to reinforce the case for withdrawal and there was now less justification for staying in the Gulf than in South East Asia. Indeed while the immediate diplomatic response to the June war was that Britain should remain in the Gulf, the Cabinet, according to Patrick Gordon Walker, was now convinced that "... our presence East of Suez was both vain and costly".[2] It is clear that even in July the Government had decided upon a general time-scale for withdrawal from the Gulf. But the earlier speculation in the press about a possible British intervention in the six-day war was evidently tantamount to an inspired leak.[3]

This whole question of whether to publish firm dates for withdrawal was clearly affected by the disastrous experience of Aden. Its effect on the Gulf decision was in fact greater than on the Far Eastern decision, but in any event the Government compromised by setting no firm date for withdrawal but by indicating that it would leave some time in the mid-1970s. This strategem was designed to encourage the area to make its own "defence and economic arrangements", while still not inflexibly committing the British Government to a withdrawal by a definite date regardless of the circumstances at the time.

The British Government was particularly concerned that Singapore and Malaysia should join together to provide for their own defence. Although the Cabinet feared that relations between the two countries had worsened so much that it was inconceivable that Britain might become involved in

1 Vol. 747, H. of C., 5th June, 1967, Col. 140. Written answers.

2 Gordon Walker, P. Op. cit., p.127

3 See Rostow, Eugene, Peace in the Balance, p. 261. "The idea of an allied naval escort plan to carry out the guarantee of 1957 (reaffirming the international character of the strait of Tiran) was first broached by George Brown .... Brown's idea received strong support in many parts of the American government". Both Brown and Wilson confirm the basis of this in their respective accounts of this episode.

internecine conflict between its Far Eastern allies. The Government's hope was that once a date for withdrawal was agreed, Malaysia and Singapore would face the fact that their security depended on improved relations and mutual tolerance.

Despite the Government's declared optimism about the future of the Far East, the decision to withdraw was not an easy one to take. There were great risks involved. There were obligations which would have to be drastically reviewed if not actually abandoned, and there was the real fear that the economy of Singapore might be weakened. Nevertheless, the economic, political and strategic arguments for withdrawal were overwhelming and the Government was pursuaded that it had no choice but to admit that Britain's traditional role was about to be concluded rapidly.

These strategic arguments were to play a vital part in the next series of defence decisions taken a few months later. However it can be seen that the July measures did not emerge from any one overwhelming constraint. They were due to a multiplicity of factors - economic vulnerability, Party pressure, doubts about Britain's strategic capacity to discharge the East of Suez role, concern about the escalating risks involved, and even doubts about the value of the role itself.

The Government, though, was reluctant to withdraw too abruptly from its commitments, and it followed a policy which demanded enormous sensitivity and diplomatic finesse. It warned its allies about the need to co-operate with each other, but it did not threaten; it sought to reassure, but not to give an erroneous sense of security; it urged its allies to act with speed, but not from a sense of panic. The July

measures were of course a compromise. Britain re-formulated her commitments East of Suez but did not end them; it would intervene in some conflict situations not others; it would withdraw from some bases but not all; it would be departing soon but it could not say exactly when. There was though, a conviction that the Government had produced a definitive Defence White Paper.

Within a few weeks however even this was in doubt. It was soon clear that the July measures far from being a final statement were only an interim report. It was the beginning in fact of a remarkable sequence of events. For the demise of the Defence White Paper was rather sudden. And yet the July defence measures remained the 'historic' decisions that Mr. Healey had argued they were.

The July measures suggested that the East of Suez role would be terminated, even if it were to be a lingering and painful demise. Britain was still East of Suez - but not for long.

C H A P T E R XI

BRITAIN STANDS DOWN

Harold Wilson took over the Department of Economic Affairs on 28th August, as the economic crisis worsened. On 3 October the Treasury announced that gold reserves had dropped for the fourth consecutive month. The half per cent increase in Bank Rate that month did little to relieve pressure on the pound. On 5 November the pound reached its lowest level in ten years. Nine days later the trade figures, reflecting recent dock strikes in Liverpool and London showed a huge deficit, and the pound had its worst day ever.

The Cabinet finally decided that Britain had had enough. On Thursday, 16th November, the decision to davalue the pound by 14.3 per cent was taken. It was announced two days later. It added £50 million to the annual cost of defence immediately. [1]

'Devaluation' was such a difficult idea in Government circles, since it was believed that even a public reference to it could precipitate a crisis, that little or no attempt was made to work out what to do if devaluation actually became necessary. Mr. Wilson's attitude towards devaluation was the critical factor. He later explained that "Recalling the devaluation of 1949, I was aware that there would be timid and frightened people thronging the post office and bank counters pathetically believing that for every pound of their savings they had invested there, they could now draw only seventeen shillings. I was anxious to ally these fears. The act of devaluation meant at the same time that every pound an individual held or earned abroad automatically,

[1] In terms of sterling, devaluation increased the cost of F111K by one-sixth, the Phantom by one-tenth and the C130 by one seventh. See Healey, D. Vol. 754, H. of C., 23rd November, 1967. Col.422.

by the very act of devaluation, would produce not twenty but seventeen shillings on conversion into a foreign currency. That had nothing to do with what devaluation would, over a period of time, mean for prices. For, clearly, if we bought a ton of foreign wheat at sixty-five dollars per ton we should have to pay more for it in sterling terms and this would, over a period of time, enter into the price of bread. I recalled that Sir Stafford Cripps, eighteen years earlier, in his post-devaluation broadcast, had forecast a rise of 1½d in the cost of a loaf. Obviously, this would happen again".[1]

Economic experts were, and still are, divided in the merits and demerits of devaluation. Devaluation makes a country's goods cheaper to other nations and theirs dearer to it. Whether a country can sell enough exports to cover the increased cost of imports, and then add some - or there will still be a deficit on the balance of payment - depends largely on the state of world trade. If it devalues just before a boom in world trade things should get better. If the economies of countries which buy its goods begin to stagnate, however, or if its own salesmen just sit back hoping that lower prices will do the trick, then devluation fails.

It was clear that in the economic package which accompanied devaluation, the main burden was found to fall most heavily on the Defence budget. The Government settled on proposed cuts amounting to £100 million.[2] Mr. Healey, by now spreading the cuts to all the three

[1] Wilson, H. The Labour Government 1964-70, p. 588.

[2] The total cut in Government expenditure was £400 million, D. Vol. 754, H of C. op. cit

services equally, distributed the cuts 'equitably' as possible. H.M.S. Victorious was to be phased out immediately and not in 1969, the final eight Buccaneers were to be cancelled and so was the Army's heavy-lift helicopter. The three services faced the shape of things to come: diminished defence resources were to become a well-established trend. In addition the plans for a staging post at Aldabra were dropped and the research and development programme was greatly reduced.

The immediate consequences of these cuts on the East of Suez role were however slight. It was clear already however that the loss of Aldabra would limit Britain's strategic flexibility,[1] but even allowing for this and the phasing out of 'Victorious', the East of Suez role remained both credible and essentially intact. This fact was obscured and it was assumed that the decision to speed up withdrawal immediately followed the decision to devalue. This impression was quite false. Yet what was remarkable was the complete reversal in Government thinking that occurred in the six weeks after devaluation.

On 27th November, Mr. Healey was arguing that "We can have no reversal of the July decisions, which revised Britain's overseas policy over the next decade... "and that "... these cuts mean no acceleration in the rundown in the redeployment of our forces".[2] Mr. Callaghan, too, was anxious to tell the House of Commons in late November that "As regards defence, we are satisfied that the reduction of £100 million in the budget planned for next year can be made within the framework of the defence policies announced last summer".[3] In the new

[1] This would be particularly true if her forces were unable to overfly the Arab or CENTO countries; but in the case of Singapore, the Westabout route was nearly as cheap as using Adabra and the Southabout route.

[2] Vol. 755, H. of C., 27th November, 1967, Col. 59.

[3] Vol. 754, H. of C., 20th November, 1967, Col. 937.

year, though, that framework was regarded as inadequate and was abandoned.

Government assurances about the future of the Fl11 proved just as impermanent. During a speech by the Prime Minister in late November, one M.P. noisely interjected "What about the Fl11?", to which Mr. Wilson retorted "We are not changing that".[1] Just two months later though it was changed. A similar blandness was also to discomfort Mr. Healey when as late as 18th December he was still insisting to a somewhat sceptical House that "We do not propose to cancel this aircraft".[2] This was an unfortunate remark for on the very same day the Prime Minister was promising the major review of public expenditure which was to lead to its cancellation.[3] The Government found co-ordination of its contradictory policy increasingly difficult to achieve.

That two months elapsed between devaluation and the decision to accelerate the East of Suez withdrawal, was inescapably due to the reason that the Government was caught by the untoward events of November.

Further confusion and consternation was caused by the resignation of Mr. Callaghan and the appointment of a new Chancellor, Mr. Jenkins, on 27th November. This dramtic appointment explains the definite shift in the Government's position in the new year. The new chancellor at No. 11 Downing Street was a stronger man than his predecessor. He was much less of a public relations exponent: his approach was instrumental rather than expressive.[4] He had fought for the TSR2, but with its cancellation he had become dedicated to dismantling Britain's World

[1] Vol. 754, H. of C., 22nd November, 1967, Col. 1341

[2] Vol. 756, H. of C., 18th December 1967, Col. 310. Written answers.

[3] The Fl11 programme would have cost the government £425 million over the next ten years. See Healey, D. Vol. 756, H. of C. 13th December 1967, Cols. 131-2. This figure was higher than the initial estimate because it was "... subject to adjustment in the light of increases in labour and material costs.." Healey, D. Vol. 744, H. of C., 12th April, 1967, Col. 188. Written answers.

[4] See Cartwright, D. and Zander, A. Group Dynamics, 1968, who suggest two types of leaders, those who are 'expressive' and those who are 'instrumental'. Callaghan as Chancellor came firmly in the former category.

Role. Mr. Jenkins constructed an economic strategy with intellectual power. Labour had acquired its first real chancellor since taking office in 1964.

The chastened Cabinet was so dispirited that it was in no mood to oppose a strong-minded new Chancellor who might just be able to revive the economy, revitalise the Party itself and enhance the chances of electoral victory, all at the same time. Mr. Jenkins, however, made it clear that his new strategy could only be successful if defence cuts were introduced. By mid-January he had gathered enough momentum to push through a package on public expenditure which included the intention to withdraw from East of Suez by the end of 1971. This decision was announced to the House on the 18th January. The reversal of Labour's grand strategic pretensions were now the Cabinet's chief aim.

Underlying the policy of withdrawal - now as in the previous July - was now the confident belief that political stability had been restored East of Suez. The Cabinet's assumptions about future stability in the area were obviously crucial to any phased withdrawal plan. If favourable estimates could not be drawn, if bloodshed, chaos and disruption were inevitably to follow disengagement, then the Government would have to possibly reconsider its schedule for withdrawal.

That there were in Parliament and in Whitehall diverging assessments of the implications of Britain's withdrawal, was, in part, due to the erratic and volatile nature of politics in the East of Suez area. To what extent would President Nasser promote revolution in the Persian Gulf and how successful would be he? Was South-East Asian security really as tenuous as the 'Domino Theory' suggested? Could the Asian

states establish their own balance of power? There were the major imponderables upon which stability East of Suez largely depended and about which only largely intuitive political and strategic assessments were possible. But as the government grappled with these issues it was also clear that the alternative government found facing-up to realities just as painful and confusing.

At its most basic, the belief held by the Conservative Party was that Britain's withdrawal from East of Suez would both increase local turmoil in an area already noted for its unrest and instability, and create a vacuum which would be eagerly occupied by the major Communist Powers. This was not only the official view of the Conservative Party, but also the view held by many Labour M.P.s[1]

This applied particularly to South East Asia, where it was thought there were insufficient indiginous forces to fill any vacuum left by the British. Australia and New Zealand were already fighting in Vietnam, Japan was inclined towards pacifism and India was non-aligned. In addition, it was argued that even if the United States were prepared to take on Britain's role, she would not be welcomed by the local powers for fear of importing the Cold War. The U.N. was simply seen as impotent, castrated by economic and even more politically weakening developments which shifted the balance of power within the organisation in favour of third world countries.

It was not only the chances of superpower involvement which concerned the Opposition Front Bench. It was equally concerned about

[1] See Williams, Alan. 'A Stake East of Suez', Socialist Commentary, September, 1967.

[2] See the much earlier view of the UN developed by Sir Alec Douglas-Home in 1961. James, Rhodes Robert. Britain's Role in the United Nations, p. 36.

the possibility of greater local tension.[1] It was certain, so the argument ran, that Singapore's economy, already suffering from a 10% unemployment rate, would decline still more.[2] There was the probability of heightening racial antagonisms between China and Malaya, as well as the ever present danger of inter-state squabbling stemming from local territorial claims. And not least there was the appalling frailty of the Federation to consider. It was clear that the political elites of both major British parties were divided over the relevance of the world role.

Gloomy Tory prohecies were also made about the Persian Gulf. The Conservatives had unceasingly accused President Nasser of trying to take over Aden and to infiltrate Muscat and Oman "... the soft underbelly of Saudi Arabia".[3] Similarly they saw his Yemen ambitions simply as an attempt "... to subvert Saudi Arabia and reach through to the Persian Gulf"[4] Nor was Egyptian nationalism the only threat to local stability. In addition there were the multitude of claims and counter claims in the Gulf area. The Iraqui claim on Kuwait, the Iranian claim on Bahrain, the Saudi Arabian claim on Burami were all evidence of incipient regional anarchy.[5]

[1] An interesting Conservative view of the prerequisite of internal stability was revealed when leading front benchers emphasized that it was unreasonable to expect Singapore to provide for its own defence when it had neither the technical skills nor a sufficiently strong "officer class". Vol. 742, H. of C., 27th February, 1967, Cols. 162-188.

[2] It was estimated that one-fifth of Singapore's G.N.P. was generated directly or indirectly from the British presence. Britain employed about 31,500 civilians or about 6% of the labour force. Singapore got £58 million in foreign exchange from Britain, and Malaysia £16 million. See Hanning, H, 'Britain East of Suez - Facts and Figures,' International Affaris, Vol. 42, No. 2, April 1966, p. 253.

[3] Martin, Vol. 742, H. of C., 27th February, 1967, Col. 178.

[4] Amery, J. Vol. 725, H. of C., 8th March, 1966, Col. 1962.

[5] The Permanent Alliance, op. cit., pp. 191-204.

These local tensions, according to the Conservatives, would almost certainly be manipulated by the Soviet Union who would now be welcomed in Iraq, Iran and even Aden. Indeed Mr. Maudling warned that Russian influence could quite clearly be seen moving "... through the Yemen and probably.. if a vacuum is left by us ... into the Gulf also".[1]

Conservative parliamentary spokesmen were also anxious to point out that once Britain had left the East of Suez area she could no longer react quickly and with strength since she would have no force on the spot, no aircraft carriers and now no F111s. The concept of a mobile strategic reserve was simply dismissed as irrelevant. "The Suez Canal is closed apparently indefinitely", argued Mr. Boyd Carpenter, "Aden is gone; Simonstown is jeopardised; there is the Arab Barrier to airtrooping; and there will be no heavy equipment in the area. What will be the use of putting a few unhappy soldiers into transport aircraft and flying them across the world to areas where airfields may not be secured and where there is no heavy equipment?[2]"

The essence of the Conservative critique was not that disengagement was in principle the wrong policy, but that 1971 was too early to disengage. According to the Opposition there would now be no time for Britain's former allies to provide for their own defence and in some cases there would be total economic disruption. Moreover a British withdrawal it was thought held serious implications for the West in general. According to Mr. Maudling it would have "... a profound effect upon American policy", and he added that there was a real danger of the United States abandoning "... any attempt to contain Communist

[1] Vol. 756, H. of C., 18th January, 1968, Col. 2073.

[2] Vol. 756, H. of C., 18th January, 1968, Col. 2024.

expansion in that area" and returning to "... isolationism".[1]

It was though, Britain's direct commercial interests - the need for such raw materials as oil, copper, tin and rubber - that primarily vexed the Tories. Mr. Sandys gloomily told the House "It is quite possible that when we go the whole area will fall under Russian influence. The Russians are all the time extending their position in the Arabian Peninsula. In that case it is more than likely that we shall see our numerous concessions cancelled and our oil wells and other installations expropriated. This by itself would wipe out at one stroke a large chunk of the saving the Government hope to obtain. If we were also to lose a substantial part of our commercial assets in South-East Asia the cuts would prove a ruinously expensive economy."[2] Mr. Heath, too, underlined that the Soviet Union was about to purchase oil from the Gulf and that this would "... put her in a stronger position to deny oil to the Western world when she wants to do so..."[3]

Without doubt then, the Conseratives believed that Britain's withdrawal would enhance local violence both in the Persian Gulf and in South-East Asia and would enlarge the opportunity for the communists to indulge in political subversion and in the manipulation of local rivalires. Given this view the Conservatives attempted to reinforce Britain's commitment to her traditional values. Even those Conservatives who conceded that there were growing signs of regional co-operation and local defence-mindedness argued that it was as yet only a weak aspiration that had to be nurtured over a period of time and that, if

[1] Vol. 757, H. of C., 25th January, 1968, Col. 644.

[2] Vol. 756, H. of C., 17th January, 1968, Cols. 1849-50.

[3] Vol. 760, H. of C., 5th March, 1968, Col. 247.

it were exposed to a hostile environment as early as 1971, it would almost certainly wither and perhaps die. The right obviously feared that the decision to withdraw was precipitate and ill-considered.

The Government was however guardedly optimistic about withdrawal. Indeed it became obvious that as its optimism increased the more pessimistic it became about Britain's balance of payments position - the policy of withdrawal hardened as the pound weakened. Its optimism was in fact a relatively dramatic phenomenom. As we have seen, the Government had not always been so inclined to take such a hopeful view about the prospects for world peace if Britain conceded an inch East of Suez.

In February 1965, the Statement on Defence had claimed that the "... British contribution is paramount in many areas East of Suez".[1] The 1966 Defence Review had been equally dogmatic. It asserted that "... the visible presence of British forces by itself is a deterrent to local conflict".[2] It also made the rather grandiose claim that "... our ability to give rapid help to friendly governments, with even small British forces, can prevent large scale catastrophes".[3] The rationale behind Britain's role was construed as that of a great power making a significant contribution to international security on the grand scale. And this role had prevented, it was argued, the escalation of conflict into major disasters.

Apparently such catastrophes no longer seemed likely by late 1967, when the Foreign Secretary was able to declare that the cut in the forces East of Suez was made possible because "... we were confident

[1] Statement on Defence Estimates, February 1965, Cmnd. 2592, p. 9.

[2] Statement on Defence Estimates, February 1966, Part I, The Defence Review, Cmnd. 2901, p.7.

[3] Statement on Defence Estimates, February 1966, Part I, The Defence Review, Cmnd. 2901, p.7.

in the independent future and stability of South-East Asia".[1] He went on to speculate with great enthusiasm about the great political and economic progress being made and concluded that "... the prospects look bright".[2] Mr. Brown had curiously not been so dogmatic just one month before at the Labour Party Conference, when he solemnly reminded the delegates that Britain could not withdraw from East of Suez before the mid 1970s "... and give the Singapore Government time to readjust its economy, time to find other ways of looking after its people".[3]

By early 1968, though, the doubts and anxieties expressed at the Party Conference had almost passed from view and the Foreign Secretary was no arguing that "The contribution which the British troops in Singapore and Malaysia can make to the stability of South-East Asia is .... becoming progressively less relevant".[4]

Perhaps the manifold contradictions in Government policy were most vividly illustrated by the co-existence of two statements that were so obviously irreconcilable that they represented a genuine duality of policy and not as yet real evidence of the finesse that made it possible for them both to form the basis of policy almost simultaneously. One of these statements appeared in the official Labour Party publication *Talking Points* which said that withdrawal from East of Suez "... is likely to ensure greater stability as the Governments involved become independent of our constant protection".[5] Even allowing for the fact that this was a statement prepared by the Labour Party's research department and not by a Minister of the Crown it could hardly be

[1] Vol. 753, H. of C., 2nd November, 1967, Col. 336.

[2] ibid.

[3] Labour Party Conference Report, 4th October, 1967, p. 234.

[4] Vol. 756, H. of C., 18th January, 1968, Col. 2080.

[5] Talking Points, No. 12, August 1968, p.7.

reconciled with Mr. Wilson's analysis. The other statement was the one made by the Prime Minster in June 1966 which has already been mentioned.[1] It was at that time that Harold Wilson passionately warned a meeting of the P.L.P., that a withdrawal from East of Suez would be the "surest prescription for a nuclear holocaust". Not only does the Prime Minister's statement highlight a gross and curious inconsistency in Government policy, but it also prompts the question as to whether by his decision of January 1968 he was really now conceding that, for the sake of a few million pounds, he was willing to do something that was the 'surest prescription' for nuclear war? Even Mr. Healey had to admit that the Prime Minister might have "overegged the pudding".[2] And so it remained that the Government's position looked unconvincing. Apparently the relevance and importance of Britain's East of Suez role could fluctuate fortuitously from one month to another.

Perhaps the most compelling explanation of the Government's inconsistency is that, just as it had built-upon and exaggerated Britain's role East of Suez to justify a British presence, so, after devaluation, it played down its importance in order to vindicate the decision to withdraw. An even more obviously, as Crossman suggests, equally valid explanation was that the Government quite frankly did not know what consequences would follow withdrawal.[3] As the anxiety of the moment dictated, the Prime Minister would speak of 'great risks' then even Mr. Jenkins would speak of 'difficulty and upheaval' and Mr. Brown of 'undobted risks', while on other occasions these same men

[1] This was, of course, the difference between the party and governmental perspective which is a built-in duality which can be perceived in all political parties. But this particular contradiction is a striking example of the difference between these two perspectives.

[2] The Policies of Power, op. cit. p. 217.

[3] Crossman, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 313.

would erect contrarily the argument that local conflict might diminish and the danger of communism weaken as a result of the decision.

The Government even began to articulate some sympathy for the once repudiated view that a British presence might, after all, act as an irritant; that it might, far from lessening, in fact exacerbate and provoke local differences and attract the subversion and chaos and menace it was supposed to deter. On Mr. Healey's own admission the Government was "... very conscious that in some cases our imperial history might make the presence of our forces an irritant rather than a stabilising factor..."[1]

In this sense a British presence had become counter-productive. It might act as a stimulant for outside pressures, and more critical still it might also induce a false sense of security within the area. The Government in the fullness of time, was left articulating the not unreasonable doctrine that an unequivocal commitment to the effect that Britain was quitting the East of Suez area might in fact compel Britain's allies into constructing their own defence structures. According to Mr. Brown this would inevitably happen "... as soon as these other countries understand that we are, in fact, withdrawing".[2] Clearly Britain hoped that a local balance of power would emerge.

While the Government's overall expectation was much less hopeful and confident than it actually appeared, its spasmodic and selective references to specific areas East of Suez appeared by way of compensation tinged with a new-found confidence. When drawing attention to the situation

[1] Vol. 757, H. of C., 25th January, 1968, Co. 622

[2] Vol. 757, H. of C., 24th January, 1968, Col. 431.

in the Gulf, Government spokesmen took obvious relish in reminding the Opposition that President Nasser had failed in his attempt to subjugate Syria, Iraq, Jordan and the Yemen and that until he had done that, he could not possibly usurp control of Saudi Arabia or dominate the Gulf.

Moreover, Government optimism rose to considerable heights at the prospect of a Federation between the Gulf States, and from the growing Egyptian fear of 'another Yemen'. The Foreign Secretary was visibly elated that "The Government of the United Arab Republic have decided to withdraw their forces entirely from the Yemen by the middle of December.."[1]. The Government also looked to the common interest shared by Iran and Saudi Arabia in keeping Egypt and the Soviet Union out of the Gulf. In the opinion of Mr. Brown "... the self-interest of the States concerned.... will ensure that peace and stability will survive".[2] His prediction proved correct enough.

The Foreign Secretary, though, still found it hard going in his bid to reassure a restive and understandably sceptical House of Commons. He could only point to his "own intuition" and to the fact that, after giving the Persian Gulf issue a great deal of thoughtful consideration he had reached the inescapable conclusion "... that the sooner the states in the area can look after themselves the better". He continued "There comes a time when an alien military presence is a divisive and not a cohesive force. I have long thought that this time had come".[3]

The Foreign Secretary was also strongly convinced that an indigenous balance could be created by 1971. "It is my belief" he said "that this time scale gives adequate time to make the transition to a new system

[1] Vol. 753, H. of C., 2nd November, 1967, Col. 337.

[2] Vol. 756, H. of C., 18th January, 1968, Col. 2081.

[3] Vol. 756, H. of C., 18th January, 1968, Col. 2080.

not dependent on the presence of British troops".[1] Mr. Brown, seeming to grow in stature as his speech progressed, ended with a confident prediction that, "The present situation in the Gulf is as calm as it has been for many years".[2]

The Government articulated similarly sanguine assumptions about the possibility of local harmony in South-East Asia. A recrudescence of the Indonesia-Malaysia confrontation was now considered unlikely because Indonesia was beyond doubt "... emerging from a dark period..."[3] It was also assumed that local tension would be reduced as collective efforts were made to bring about regional security through a united South-East Asian bid to contain China. The convergence of politico-strategic interests it was said would overshadow the relatively trivial local differences. The Government was convinced that the picture was increasingly encouraging from the point of view of a British disengagement from East of Suez. The Foreign Secretary argued that "There are many signs from South-East Asia that events there are on the move, and on the move in the right direction".[4]

The hope also persisted that Australia and New Zealand would take a greater interest in the area, and that Britain could still influence local events by helping Singapore in terms of sophisticated equipment and specialist staff.[5] The Foreign Secretary was hardly able to contain his optimism, "... the roots of peace are growing", he exclaimed with characteristic vigour. "The nations of the area are coming together as

[1] Vol. 756, H. of C., 18th January, 1968, Col. 2081.

[2] ibid.

[3] Vol. 753, H. of C., 2nd November, 1967, Col. 336.

[4] Vol. 753, H. of C., 2nd November, 1967, Col. 335.

[5] Mr. Wilson promised that Britain would be prepared to assist "... in establishing a future joint air defence system for Malaysia and Singapore and in training personnel to operate it". Vol. 756, H. of C., 16th January, 1968, Col. 1581.

the various regional groupings for mutual co-operation evolve and develop".[1] And then later, in a passage expressing considerable hope but based upon a logic which Britain's allies could have only viewed with incredulity, Mr. Brown roundly asserted that "There can be British influence without British armies on the spot. Indeed, I go further... and repeat that the influence and the help which many of our friends in Asia look to us to provide can be more effective without military backing".[1] Of course, whatever the truth of Mr. Brown's proposition, it was an argument which was exactly the opposite to that advanced previously. If Malaysia and Signapore revealed anxieties about the assumptions upon which this argument was based, they could always take comfort in Mr. Healey's assessment that "There is no doubt that the danger of war in South-East Asia at the moment is very low".[2] The Cabinet was now agreed that stability in South-East Asia was assured.

The likelihood of Chinese aggression, seemingly a foregone conclusion in Conservative thinking before the Heath-Peking detente, had never greatly influenced the Labour Government. It not only considered that Chinese aggression was unlikely while she was still weak and absorbed in internal development but it also believed that a British presence only marginally affected Chinese action anyway. Mr. Wilson's belief in Britain's ability to interpose herself between India and China was repudiated. Moreover the growing mood in British politics was that the West should support but not replace Asian efforts at containment. The Government was openly leading the field in the articulation of this doctrine.

While it was fairly clear that the Government's confidence about

[1] Vol. 757, H. of C., 24th January, 1968, Col. 434.

[2] Cited by Enoch Powell, Vol. 760, H. of C., 4th March, 1968, Col. 82, referring to a statement by Mr. Healey on 7th January 1968.

the future of East of Suez was now strongly expressed, it was more difficult to determine what that confidence meant in terms of actual British interests. Indeed no real in-house attempt was made by the Government to evaluate in depth what it thought might happen to Britain's specific economic, strategic, and political interests East of Suez after 1971. The Cabinet felt that it was sufficient to assert that there was a good chance of stability East of Suez and that no further analysis was either desirable or necessary. The Government's assumptions about stability were predicated mainly on strategic arguments; it was also clear that the Defence and Overseas Policy Committee considered that Britain's strategic interests would not be greatly imperilled by a withdrawal from South-East Asia.[1]

It is clear that the Cabinet knew that Britain's economic stake in the area was of such magnitude and that no Government could withdraw unless it thought those interests also would remain free from direct menace and more or less intact.[2] It was certainly evident that the Government was now denying the relevance of military force in the protection of economic interests. "Access to raw materials, trade and investment" said Mr. Healey "... are things which must be separated from military force or they will suffer and not gain".[3] The Government moreover had come round to the widespread European view that the Arabs could not 'drink their oil' and that anyway Britain and the Arab oil-

1 Crossman, op. cit. Vol II p. 308 313

2 Britain's economic stake in the area was massive. Investment in the Gulf was about £900 million; imports from the Gulf were valued at £395 million, exports at £302 million; sterling holdings of Middle East Governments amounted to £459 million; percentage of British oil imports about 46%. Annual foreign exchange income equalled £200 million. British investments in Malaysia and Singapore came to £700 million. These figures were given by Sir Alec Douglas Home, Vol. 757, H. of C., 24th January, 1968, Col. 424.

3 Vol. 760, H. of C., 5th March, 1968, Col. 362.

producing states had an interdependent relationship which reflected mutual self-interest.[1]

Yet given the magnitude of the decision taken by the Cabinet the Government was curiously silent on the question of specific 'national interests'. This was not due to a lack of opposition pressure; the Conservatives even moved a motion condemning the Government for not 'producing a coherent policy for the protection of Great Britain's vital sea communications".[2]

While the Government could hardly avoid the need to appear concerned to define Britain's interests in the face of such a specific and formal attack, its response was incredibly vague and evasive. It simply declared that the motion was really irrelevant to the question of whether or not to withdraw from East of Suez which may indeed have been correct but the Cabinet missed an opportunity to spell out a new strategic doctrine. It argued that British warships had not been able since the war to protect all the sea lanes East of Seuz, that "... trade, to a large extent, protects itself by mutual profitability"[3], and that in both the Gulf and South-East Asia, there was a sufficient build up of local naval forces to prevent piracy. This rather low-key debate was significantly the only time the Government revealed, with any degree of detail how it saw Britain's overseas interests in the 1970s and beyond and what might happen to Britain's interests when she no longer had a military capability or presence East of Suez.

For the most part, then, the Government's views were inexact and ill-developed backed by no coherent strategic or political doctrine.

1 See Maull, Hanns. Oil and Influence: the Oil Weapon Examined. IISS, 1975. This study examines the interaction between OPEC and the oil consuming states.

3 Mr. Foley, Under Secretary of State for Defence for the Royal Navy, Vol. 760, H. of C., 11th March, 1968, Col. 1010.

2 Vol. 760, H of C. 5th March 1968, col. 362

The Government's approach was incremental and ad hoc revealing no new consensus about Britain's role either in Europe or outside. Perhaps though this was inevitable, given the nature of the calculation that the Government was expected to make. At any rate there was no coherent prediction about the probable repercussions of a premature withdrawal. Even the Cabinet was seriously divided and, as Crossman, Brown and Wigg were to reveal, individual ministers argued for a variety of interests and policies without much regard for an overall view or central idea.[1] For instance Mr. Healey remained unconvinced about the prospects for stability East of Suez, and, not surprisingly, was emphatically less confident than the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. Jenkins. Indeed the overall Cabinet mood lay somewhere between these two men. Most ministers took the view that withdrawal would probably heighten the likelihood of instability East of Suez, but that the evidence was not so overwhelming as to decisively point to a strategy which prolonged Britain's role East of Suez and they all saw good reasons for quitting the area. The Government's assessment then was strictly neutral - if not agnostic. It provided neither sufficient reason for staying nor for leaving.

[1] This is apparent from the various accounts of the Labour Government which have appeared since 1970 from the pens of Brown, Crosman, Patrick Gordon Walker, Wigg and Harold Wilson himself. Also Christopher Mayhew has argued his case in several studies. But his best contribution lies in his study Britain's Role Tomorrow.

C H A P T E R XII

THE WITHDRAWAL DECISION

The decision to withdraw from East of Suez by 1971 was justified by the Government almost exclusively in regard to economic considerations. And yet the economic case for an accelerated withdrawal had not always been so pronounced in official explanations. In November 1967, Mr. Healey had stressed "the economic benefits" that accrued to Britain from being East of Suez "... for the very small additional defence costs involved.." He went on to assert that "... there is very little economic advantage in the areas where the Chancellor wishes to get advantages, in speeding redeployment..". He concluded, "The economic facts are these. To save £100 million on the budget in the Far East we have to spend £500 million in the U.K..".[1] Mr. Victor Goodhew, Conservative MP for St. Albans, argued that, on the basis of that statement "maintaining in the UK the 12,000 who have returned from the Far East will cost as much as keeping 60,000 out there. The 18,000 who have returned from 'South Arabia and elsewhere' will presumably cost as much as keeping 90,000 troops in the Middle East, and the 5,000 coming back from Germany will cost as much as keeping 100,000 over there."[2] There was a great deal of truth in this. Brigadier Thompson contended that "The facile solution for reducing overseas defence expenditure is to bring the forces home. For the Army there were two snags to this: lack of accommodation and lack of training area. On existing plans the home garrison is short of 14,000 married quarters."[3]

This was not the only potential cost of withdrawal. As we have seen Britain had economic interests in the area which might be put at risk.

[1] Vol. 755, H. of C., 27th November, 1967, Col. 60.

[2] Vol. 755, H. of C., 27th November, 1967, Col. 104.

[3] Thompson, W., The Daily Telegraph, 17th August, 1966.

There was also the realization that cancellation charges would have to be honoured and "substantial" aid given to local allies.[1] Furthermore there was the risk that Singapore and Malaysia in a mood of disenchantment would retaliate by the threat to withdraw their sterling balances from London to the tune of £400 million. In November the Government seemed to accept that the economic case for withdrawal was by no means incontrovertible.

However, by mid-January the situated had changed dramatically and Mr. Brown was now asserting the doctrine that for Britain to go on being over-extended as she had been, would lead her along "... the path to bankruptcy".[2] Even Mr. Healey emphasized that "... the savings we had made and plan to make in defence expenditure are necessary if our economy is to flourish".[3] These were substantially the very cuts which were apparently unnecessary three months earlier. Not suprisingly there were many who doubted the Government's argument that the cuts had been reluctantly introduced for economic considerations.

This complete reversal in Government doctrine was not made any more credible by the Government openly conceding that the cuts would bring no immediate economic benefit. Indeed, Mr. Jenkins conceded that ".... these defence cuts will not yield any net saving in 1968-9. On the contrary, there will be some cancellation charges to be met."[4] The Prime Minister made the same point "The immediate effect will not be to reduce the level of defence expenditure: indeed, in 1968-9 ..... the level will be increased through cancellation payments and other

[1] In the event the aid given to Malaysia and Singapore totalled £75 million, £50 million going to Singapore.

[2] Vol. 760, H. of C., 4th March, 1968, Col. 54.

[3] Vol. 760, H. of C., 4th March, 1968, Col. 71.

[4] Vol. 756, H. of C., 17th January, 1968, Col. 1798. These cancellation charges according to Mr. Healey "... would doubtless be heavy, and there would also be a "... substantial loss of offset sales". Vol. 756, H. of C., 18th December, 1967, Col. 310.

transitional costs".[1] The justification of the cuts were certainly not therefore to make short run gains.

Nor was it, unlike the July measures, based on the need to save foreign currency. Mr. Healey emphasized that ".... the objective of the recently announced cuts was not to save foreign exchange ...".[2] It was instead "... to save Government expenditure and to enable a shift of resources into exports.... The object is completely different from the earlier one".[3]

Mr. Jenkins saw the cuts in an even deeper secular drift towards a new role. To him they were a recognition of the "... basic currents in the tide of history".[4] Mr. George Thomson, also, believed them to be in accord with "... the inexorable pattern of history..."[5]. It was clear that the cuts would make the overseas bankers more sympathetic to Britain's plight, but the main economic effect of the cuts would not be felt until the 1970s. The Government was apparently taking the long view. But this was curious since in no other respect had Britain's external policy reflected the notion of forward thinking related to long-term goals.

It was curiously ambitious of the Government, not renowned for its capacity to project policy into the seventies, to start planning for the long-term in the middle of an acute crisis. The cuts clearly would only take effect some time after the entire devaluation operation had succeeded or failed. In either case they would then seem to be largely irrelevant. Of course the possible beneficial effects of devaluation were once again exaggerated.

[1] Vol. 756, H. of C., 16th January, 1968, Col. 1584.

[2] Vol. 758, H. of C., 14th February, 1968, Col. 1346.

[3] Vol. 757, H. of C., 24th January, 1968, Col. 424.

[4] Vol. 756, H. of C., 17th January, 1968, Col. 1797.

[5] Vol. 757, H. of C., 24th January, 1968, Col. 544.

The cuts were not primarily made for economic reasons. The Government's real aim was to hold down home demand for the financial year 1968. The level of military spending around the Indian Ocean was largely irrelevant to this problem. The *Economist* indeed stressed that the saving on defence between January 1968 and the Spring of 1970 would be as little as £110 million concluding that the withdrawal decision ".. was simply one sure way to get the Labour Party to accept any restraint on domestic consumption".[1] Indeed, as Professor Thomas Wilson, of the University of Glasgow, argued in the winter of 1966, the whole question of defence cuts had become hopelessly confused with the establishment of correct social goals. "We are quite affluent enough to meet our international obligations on their present scale, or even on a larger scale", he wrote. "It is simply that we prefer to spend our resources in other ways". Foreign outlays on "liquor and tobacco are annually in the region of £140m. Imports of minor manufacturers absorb about £290m a year. Foreign travel takes another £260m. And these sums were out of a total foreign expenditure of £7,500m." In drawing attention to these figures, Professor Wilson stressed that his protest was "directed not against frivolity but against self-deception."[2]

Even so, the Government's task had been to keep down domestic consumption in relation to which the estimated level of military spending around the Indian Ocean was largely irrelevant. Spending abroad on military support infrastructure, dockyards and airfields, for example, contributed nothing to the inflation of home demand. The level of home demand was nonetheless capable of being controlled and the failure of the Government to do so was probably more a question of its own competence rather than anything else.

[1] Economist, Vol. 226, 20th January, 1968, p.18.

[2] Wilson, Thomas. op. cit.

Nevertheless it had become necessary for the Government to plan two or three years ahead. It was clear that the Government was attempting to rid itself of the constraints of crisis management and that devaluation provided the opportunity to erect a proper economic strategy, including a prices and incomes policy. It might even have been that the Government had the next general election in mind which might be as late as 1971. The defence cuts would by then be having, it was hoped, the impact they were designed to have on the economy.

It is also clear that, where national security is concerned, a Government must take a long view. Indeed a ten year projection is really required.[1] The Prime Minister explained that any "... cuts which act quickly can be achieved only with great disruption and great dis-economy". He added that if the defence decisions were not taken now "... they will not make any impact until well into the 1970s, and Parliament in 1970, 1971 and later years will be impotent to secure major savings in those programmes".[2]

Of course, the January defence cuts should not be seen in isolation; they were after all just one variable in the new Chancellor's overall economic strategy. They were related on the one side to the devaluation strategy and the November cuts, and on the other related to the March budget. The defence cuts were just one component in a strategy to "... get all the demand components - public expenditure, private consumption, investment and exports - approximately into line with our more successful trading competitors abroad.."[3] The main economic objective was then to make devaluation work in the 1970s by achieving

[1] Crisis in European Defence, op. cit. p. 42.

[2] Vol. 756, H. of C., 16th January, 1968, Col. 1592.

[3] Jenkins, R., Vol. 761, H. of C., 25th March, 1968, Col. 1041.

an export-led boom. It was to this end, so the Cabinet stressed, that the defence cuts were made.

It would be false, however, to totally dismiss the economic justification for the cuts that the Government introduced. There were three aspects to this. First, even if the cuts were from an economic point of view unnecessary or irrational - and that is putting the argument rather strongly - it could be asserted that it would be expecting too much for Governments always to behave rationally, particularly where the economy is concerned. Second, it is to be expected that a Government in deep economic trouble would look to defence cuts to help it restore economic vitality. Third, the Wilson Government had always contended that defence expenditure took too great a share of the diminishing gross national product as well as the total government expenditure.

Its failure in the economic field had also convinced it that Britain's ills were deepseated and that a long-term remedy in the form of a new balance in the economy was necessary. Defence spending was to Labour's parliamentary left-wing the ugliest evidence of a nation living beyond its means and at the expense of the underprivileged elements in society. Actually under Labour defence expenditure as a percentage of total government expenditure dropped to below 20% for the first time since the war.[1]

Nevertheless, though there were important economic considerations at stake, it also must be firmly stated that the Government over elaborated the economic argument and that the Cabinet was fully aware that the defence cuts were not as directly central to its economic

[1] The figures for 1963-6 inclusive were 21%, 20.2%, 18.1%. Figures given by Mr. Diamond, Chief Secretary to the Treasury. Vol. 750, H. of C., 11th July, 1967, Col. 50. Written answers.

strategy as it now so strongly emphasized. Indeed, some Ministerial statements were patently absurd. The ebullient Mr. Brown, showing a great anxiety to clutch at whatever straw lay to hand in a bid to relieve the unmitigating gloom, was quite intoxicated with the opportunity the cuts gave Britain. "Last week's decision" he said "can mark a turning point in the nation's life. They can mark the foundation-stone for our long delayed recovery, recovery not just of economic solvency, but of Britain's pride and dignity among nations. They can mark not only the end of an old illusion, but the beginning of a new achievement".[1]

While Mr. Brown's heady optimism reassured the nervous, which arguably included the entire Cabinet, it was clear that the savings Labour planned to make were substantial. The defence budget of 1972-3 was to be no more than £1,600 million - £1,650 million at 1964 prices. The Government could boast that in its first five years of office it had saved over £1,600 million on the Conservative programme and that between 1967-8 and 1972-3 that figure would rise by a further £3000 million.

According to the Government, however, savings of this magnitude could only be realised if Britain withdrew not only from the Far East, but from the Persian Gulf also. Mr. Thomson argued that it was "... impracticable to separate them in any meaningful way which will produce economies...".[2] The Government rather contemptuously rejected the Conservative estimates that Britain could stay in the Gulf for as little as £12.5 million a year.[3] It insisted instead that to remain in

[1] Vol. 757, H. of C., 25th January, 1968, Col. 636.

[2] Vol. 757, H. of C., 24th January, 1968, Col. 540.

[3] Buchan, Alastair, East of Suez:"Why dangle vain hopes?", The Sunday Times, August 18th, 1968.

Gulf "... we should require to keep not only our forces now stationed in the Gulf, but also all the other forces on which they might need to call in a crisis..".[1] The fear of uncontrolled escalation was now a factor in determining government policy. Mr. Healey did not need to rehearse the argument that the cost of the Singapore base had not been excessive until confrontation with Indonesia increased defence spending dramatically. The Labour Government had learnt that bitter lesson well.

The political case for withdrawal, like the economic one, raised for Labour complex problems. The Government was sensitive to the feeling that to quit the East of Suez area would involve abandoning many loyal and close allies. Clearly the Commonwealth connexion would be irreparably weakened but also non-Commonwealth allies would feel betrayed. And this fear worried those ministers like Goronwy Roberts, the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, who in November hastened to the Persian Gulf in a bid to reassure the restive sheiks that Britain would be retaining her presence, and was then dispatched again on behalf of the Cabinet just two months later to explain that Britain would not be staying after all. The distatsteful nature of Mr. Roberts' mission was made evident by his own admission that he found his hosts in "... a state of dismay and some alarm...".[2]

Mr. Healey also must have regretted that he had spoken in November so dogmatically about Britain's obligations. In the defence debate at that time he had said "I believe, and the whole Government share my view, that we must, above all, keep faith with our forces and with our

[1] Healey, D., Vol. 757, H. of C., 25th January, 1968, Col. 623.

[2] Vol. 757, H. of C., 24th January, 1968, Col. 499.

allies in making these cuts. We can have no reversal of the July decisions...".[1] The July decisions were reversed, though, and Britain did not keep faith with her allies.

The Government rather lamely if not dishonestly argued that it had not broken any treaties. This was a defensible proposition because the vagueness and great diversity of Britain's traditional commitments made discussion about their validity unreal.[2] Nevertheless the Government was fully conscious that it had not adhered to the spirit of the treaties. It should be recalled that Mr. Brown some three months earlier had bluntly reminded the Labour Party Conference that "... unless you want us to go unilateral, unless you really want us to tear up our obligations, then I say, comrades, you seriously cannot urge us to go faster and farther than we are going now".[3] In view of this emphatic statement it was in January a difficult proposition for the Government to pretend that there had been no breaking of its word. Yet it was clear that the Government was particularly upset about sympathy for the Gulf states and tended to view the defence of Australia, New Zealand and India as no longer a unique British responsibility but a matter for all the great powers.[4]

For all the Foreign Secretary's fine rhetoric that the Government would never overlook the military support freely given to Britain in the last war, the Commonwealth was bitterly disappointed at the withdrawal decision. In the words of the New Zealand Prime Minister, Mr. Holyoake, "There is all the difference between reducing forces and removing them altogether".[5]

[1] Vol. 755, H. of C., 27th November, 1967, Col. 59.

[2] See Buchan, A., 'Britain in the Indian Ocean,' International Affairs, Royal Institute of International Affairs, London, April 1966.

[3] Labour Party Conference Report, 4th October, 1967, p. 234.

[4] The Permanent Alliance, op. cit. p. 212.

[5] Cited by Mr. Sandys, Vol. 756, H. of C., 17th January, 1968, Col. 1848.

But as Dr. Bell observed "though the British withdrawal does not leave as large a gap in Australia's security cover as it does in that of Singapore or the Persian Gulf area, it still represents a sharp deterioration of the position. It increases the already great dependence of Australia on American power, and thus reduces still further any Australian prospect of even a modest degree of diplomatic independence. A few years ago Sir Robert Menzies used to talk about Australia's 'great and powerful friends', the plural indicating Britain as well as America. As late as the end of confrontation in 1965 the British presence in South-East Asia represented a sort of alternative model to the American in crisis-management: how to win without escalating. It is a technique that will be missed."[1] Divisions of opinion developed in Australia over defence options, with interest being expressed by some in Mr. John Gorton's Government in what would have amounted to a Fortress Australia policy. This version of security, a reaction to Britain's decision to stand down East of Suez, was a mirror image of what was thought to be the neo-isolationist sentiments of some American advocates of a similar policy. For policy-planning purposes, Australian assessments were based on the belief that Britain had opted out of the Indo-Pacific theatre and could not be expected back. Canberra had also accepted the possibility that, because of US domestic political pressures, American intentions in respect of East Asia could prove to be no more trustworthy than British intentions have been. Even so, the school of thought led by Sir Paul Hasluck, the then Minister of External Affairs, won the day and Australia decided to maintain a small presence on the Malay peninsula beyond 1971.

[1] Bell, Coral., 'South-East Asia minus Britain', New Society, 18th January, 1968.

The Times caught the prevailing mood with great accuracy. The Commonwealth, it said, is now "... a jellyfish with no sting".[1]

Diplomatic pressure on Britain to stay East of Suez did not emanate only from the Commonwealth, or indeed merely from the countries located in the East of Suez area. Marked pressure also came from the United States.[2] The exact nature and degree of this pressure is still arguable, but it was certainly clear that the U.S. was more concerned about Britain's departure from the Gulf than from Singapore and Malaysia. Richard Crossman says that Wilson, though denying this, actually unwittingly appeared to confirm it. He wrote, "I found myself along with Barbara and others asking questions and extracting from the P.M. a very characteristic chain of utterances. First he repeated time after time that the Americans had never made any connection between the financial support they gave us and our support for them in Vietnam. Then about ten minutes later he was saying, 'Nevertheless, don't let's fail to realize that their financial support is not unrelated to the way we behave in the Far East: any direct announcement of our withdrawal, for example, could not fail to have a profound effect on my personal relations with L.B.J. and the way the Americans treat us."[3] But rather significantly, Washington's concern, that Britain's withdrawal would weaken or destroy its position in Vietnam and create a vacuum on its southern flank, was only weakly expressed. But President Johnson did express concern that Britain seemed indifferent to Vietnam. Yet America did not press too hard. That its opposition was not more pronounced may well have been due to its fear that the risk of Britain's heavy

[1] The Times, 24th January, 1968.

[2] Gordon Walker, P., The Cabinet, 1970, p. 124.

[3] Crossman, Vol. I., op. cit., p.456.

overspending to the international monetary system was at least as critical as any strategic danger arising from the decision to withdraw from East of Suez. At any rate American pressure was not as great as the Labour Government might have expected. Patrick Gordon Walker was most insistent that it was purely "a myth" that "... the Cabinet was influenced by the pressure exerted by the United States..."[1] Indeed President Johnson expected nothing more than "a platoon of bagpipers" by way of a British contribution to Vietnam."[2] But on the question of Britain's withdrawal from East of Suez American pressure was not great if not virtually non-existent. Mr. Gordon Walker went on to say that "More influential was Commonwealth pressure .... this was a factor that played some part in complicating the decision to abandon our bases East of Suez".[3] Indeed it 'complicated' the final decision so much as to materially delay its execution. Mr. Thomson, in fact, admitted that it was as a direct result of his own, and his colleagues', contact with overseas leaders that "... the date for withdrawal was extended from the 31st March 1971 .... to 31st December 1971".[4] Mr. Lee Kwan Yew's frantic dash to London apparently had not been in vain after all. Britain's presumed loss of influence became the dominant issue.

One of the least considered aspects of Britain's presence East of Suez was the influence she had exercised on the Indian sub-continent and in Malaysia that had been of a different character from that exerted by the USA. Relations with these countries had a permanency that provided a distinct advantage when seeking to reassure members of

[1] Gordon Walker, op. cit.

[2] Wilson, op. cit., p. 341

[3] Gordon Walker, P., Op. cit., p. 125.

[4] Vol. 757, H. of C., 24th January, 1968, Col. 535.

of the Commonwealth who were anxious about the extent of the commitment being underwritten by London.[1] This confidence was shattered by the defence decisions of early 1968. Subsequent widespread discussion of the British withdrawal from South-East Asia had probably so undermined Britain's credibility as to encourage miscalculation.

Shortly after the British announcement to accelerate her withdrawal, President Marcos, of the Philippines, signed a bill incorporating the Malaysian state of Sabah into the Republic of the Philippines, thus reasserting and keeping alive a territorial claim that was pressed at the beginning of Confrontation. Sir Paul Hasluck, when Australia's Minister of External Affairs, subsequently obtained from President Marcos an undertaking not to pursue the claim,[2] but all the same it remained a potential cause of trouble. At the meeting in Wellington on the SEATO Ministerial Council in April, 1968, Sir Paul drew attention to continuing subversion in parts of Thailand and to the Communist threat to the independence of Laos and, with references to much expanded guerrilla infiltration, he was plainly worried that Malaysia might be drawn into counter-insurgency operations.[3] It was such unstable situations as these of course, which had to be taken into account, by the USA and others with interests in the area, when considering future security arrangements in East Asia.

Britain's decision to quit Asia by 1971 underscored the need for American policy to be spelt out with some exactitude. It was realised that the British withdrawal into Europe could mean the USA would tend to adopt in Asia unilateral nuclear policies over which Britain, and

[1] Beaton, L., 'Australian Dissent', The Guardian, June 23, 1965.

[2] See Mr. John Gorton's statement in the House of Representatives, Canberra, February 25th, 1969: reprinted in Survival, April, 1969.

[3] See Keesings Contemporary Archives, 1968, p. 22258.

Western Europe generally, would have no capacity to influence in the absence of a local presence.

The principal argument frequently adduced by those in favour of a retention of the East of Suez role was the view that Britain should stay East of Suez, because if Britain withdrew from the area, her influence in the world, and particularly in Washington, would plummet. Three main dangers were evident. First that Britain's influence in Washington would greatly diminish. Second that the United States would place more of its confidence in the short run in Germany and Japan and, in the long run, in her relations directly with the Soviet Union. Third, that America would conceivably be encouraged to retreat into isolationism.[1]

The Government was well aware of these dangers even if it saw them in less dramatic terms. It was certainly obvious that Harold Wilson had long regarded the East of Suez role as a source of great diplomatic influence. The Prime Minister regarded the Labour Government as uniquely endowed to bridge the gap between America and Russia over a Vietnam settlement, provided British military power in Asia remained fairly considerable. Diplomacy based on the deployment of power in an area vital to the superpowers.[2]

On the other hand certain members of the Cabinet, including Roy Jenkins, obviously felt that less diplomatic influence in Washington might not be entirely against British interests. The Government's supposed influence over Vietnam had been often an embarrassment. Clearly the 'special relationship' with the United States was now of less immediate

[1] For a perceptive analysis of American arguments for a US withdrawal from Asia see Gelber, "History and the American Role," Orbis, Foreign Policy Research Institute, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, Spring 1967. Also see Gelber, "The American Role and World Order," The Yale Review, Yale University Press, New Haven, Summer, 1967.

[2] Denis Healey and the Policies of Power, op. cit. p. 217.

importance than a special relationship with Europe. Links with Australia had also changed.[1]

Indeed the Government was about to commit an error in supposing that France might look more favourably on Britain's application to join Europe if the World Role were openly disavowed. Mr. Healey emphasized that "... President de Gaulle has repeatedly made clear, in public and in private, that he is not prepared to consider Britain even as a candidate for membership of the Common Market so long as she retains a world-wide military role...".[2]

Even if the Government did not actually regard the overseas presence as a genuine impediment to Britain's entry into Europe, it was plainly fearful that it might be used as one. This was an important factor now in the Government's assessment of its European strategy. Mr. Healey at any rate seemed delighted that "... the reception of our (withdrawal) decision among our friends and allies in Europe has been favourable and indeed enthusiastic."[3] However for those who reasoned, like the Prime Minister and George Brown the Foreign Secretary, that devaluation and a withdrawal from East of Suez would compel de Gaulle to accept Britain, diminished and chastened, into the European Community, there was immediate disillusionment. Although George Brown himself attached great importance to the Paris visit, he observed later that "the outcome of our tour round Europe was that we persuaded the Cabinet to recommend to Parliament that Britain should make a formal application to join the Common Market".[4] Just a few days after devaluation the general once more declared against British membership of the Community.

1 See A. D. Robinson, 'Australia-New Zealand Defence', Australian Outlook, Australian Institute of International Affairs, Canberra, April 1966.

2 Vol. 760, H. of C., 5th March, 1968, Col. 358.

3 Vol. 757, H. of C., 25th January, 1968, Cols. 625-6.

4 Brown, G., op. cit., p. 221.

Harold Wilson took over the Department of Economic Affairs on 28th August, as the economic crisis worsened. On 3rd October the Treasury announced that gold reserves had dropped for the fourth consecutive month. The half per cent increase in Bank Rate that month did little to relieve pressure on the pound. On 5th November the pound reached its lowest level in ten years. Nine days later the trade figures,reflecting recent dock strikes in Liverpool and London showed a huge deficit,and the pound had its worst day ever.

The Cabinet finally decided that Britain had had enough. On Thursday 16th November, the decision to devalue the pound by 14.3 per cent was taken. It was announced two days later. It added £50 million to the annual cost of defence immediately.

Meanwhile, the Cabinet was reconsidering its attitude to the question of selling 'defensive' arms to South Africa. It began with the commercial question of arms sales to help the balance of payments, but the strategic issue of the presumed importance of the Cape sea route had to be considered after the June 1967 Six Day War. South Africa had raised the issue with the Foreign Office, and indicated that the British Government should decide whether to sell her a wide selection of naval hardware - Buccanner aircraft and frigates - as a matter of urgency. A formal reply was wanted by 31st December.

South Africa indicated that the whole question of the Simonstown treaty was at stake. About nine months earlier the British Prime Minister had agreed that the Foreign Secretary, George Brown, should put up a paper examining the question of the sale of 'defensive' arms to South Africa. They wanted to see what difference this might make to the need to cut back social services expenditure.

Dr. Vorster, South Africa's Prime Minister, in the meantime suggested that Admiral Heinrik Bierman should visit London in mid December to discuss the matter with British Chiefs of Staff. On Friday 8th December, the Cabinet's Defence and Overseas Policy sub-committee met to discuss the matter.

As usual the Prime Minister was in the chair. The committee considered George Brown's document which Wilson had earlier asked for, but about which he now had serious misgivings. The sub-committee was divided. Those present included Roy Jenkins, the new Chancellor (who replaced Jim Callaghan on 27th November) Tony Crosland, Richard Crossman, Michael Stewart, Lord Longford, Denis Healey, George Brown, George Thomson, and several junior ministers.

A member of this committee later recalled that both "Brown and Healey were keen on selling certain arms to South Africa, and said so".[1] And another one confirmed that this was so - "within the context of the difficult economic position".[2] The D.O.P.C. were fairly evenly split at their meeting on 8th December, with Wilson against the sale of arms, supported strongly by Stewart, Crossman and Longford.[3]

The meeting took place against a disturbed background. The D.O.P.C. must have been aware of the Party unrest. The idealistic Left were making clear their distaste for any sales on pragmatic economic grounds. Mr. Wilson later recalled that "The Committee was divided. I accepted Dick's proposal, making clear that at the end of the review they would still find me irrevocably opposed to any supply of arms. But, I said, if all matters with an economic bearing were to be called in question, regardless of wider overseas policy issues,

[1] This statement was supplied to the author by Lord Longford.

[2] Interview with Denis Healey recorded by the author.

[3] Crossman, op. cit., vol II p 476

regardless of moral issues, then I must insist that the Foreign Office must submit to our scrutiny, the,by that time, indefensible and anomalous restrictions on trade with Eastern Europe, under the COCOM regulations. The Foreign Office might still find it desirable to humour American prejudice, but if exports were to be the only criterion, the issue must equally be made subject to rigorous examination and justification on merit".[1]

Wilson was aware of his weak position as leader. Following devaluation his standing was low; and supporters of both Callaghan and Jenkins were engaged in trying to rally support for an alternative leader. The sale of arms therefore became the question over which the issue of the personality and style of leadership was decided.

It is difficult to sort out the myths from the facts, but it is clear that Brown, the Foreign Minister, had been discussing the question with the South Africans for more than a year on behalf of the Government. Wilson had agreed that he should put up a paper for the Cabinet to look at. There seems little doubt that the main pressure for this came from the Foreign Office, which was anxious to get the South Africans to help put pressure on the illegal Smith regime in Rhodesia.[2]

Brown left for a NATO ministerial meeting in Brussels on Monday 11th December, without a firm decision having been reached by the Cabinet; but they had agreed that the South Africans seemed to be rushing things, and should be asked to postpone their deadline. By the time he returned, on Thursday 14th December, he was convinced that Wilson was organizing a campaign against him.[3] It seems more likely that Wilson was safeguarding

[1] Wilson, op. cit., pp. 596-597.

[2] Brown, op. cit. p. 172.

[3] ibid.

his own traditional left-wing support to maintain his position as leader.

Mr. Kevin McNamara, an M.P. close to Wilson, has said that following a dinner on 11th December at which Callaghan was the principal guest, and where the question of the change of policy was freely discussed, "John Ellis and I agreed to put down an Early Day Motion to test the water". He added that this "re-affirmed our support of the declared Government policy". It was this motion, which received the approval of the Whips' Office, that was thought to be Wilson's bid to outflank Brown. Callaghan unaware that the matter was before Cabinet, had said to Labour back-benchers in reply to a question about it, that it would be necessary to weigh the economic advantages against the political disadvantages.

Richard Mitchell, a back-bench supporter of Healey, and Brown described it as "the dirtiest business imaginable".[1] His view is typical of a number of right-wing Labour M.P.s who saw the whole affair as a deliberate attempt by Wilson to organize support: "The first thing I knew was that I had a motion presented to me and was asked "Would you sign this?" and I did, because I don't believe in the sale of arms to South Africa - but John Silkin, the Chief Whip, organized it for the P.M. I found out later that this was an officially sponsored motion being used by Harold as part of an intra-Cabinet squabble. I was asked by one junior minister why the hell I had signed it."[2]

It was similarly believed that a letter signed by junior ministers, including Shirley Williams and Dr. Jeremy Bray, who reaffirmed their support for the policy of withholding arms sales, was part of Wilson's attempt to manoeuvre Brown and Healey into an awkward spot.

[1] In conversation with the author.

[2] ibid.

The Cabinet meeting, held against this background of confused suspicions on Thursday 14th December, left the question unsettled. Mr Wilson took a parliamentary question on the subject that afternoon and admitted that "I was at once pressed by Dingle Foot for an .... unequivocable assurance that in no circumstances will the export of arms not already contracted for be permitted to the Republic of South Africa".

"In view of the way in which the matter had been left by the Defence Committee, I could not give the assurance; equally, I could not indicate that any contrary decision had been taken. I was determined to see that it wasn't. In these circumstances I felt it right to indicate that the Cabinet was already looking at the matter but that I had no decision to announce. I replied:

I would have hoped to have been able to make a full statement this afternoon, but my Rt. Hon. Friend, the Foreign Secretary, who is very much concerned with these matters and should have been back this morning, was prevented by weather conditions from getting back. I think it right that these matters should be the subject of consideration when he is here, and then I will make a fuller statement in answer to my Rt. Hon. and learned Friend."

"It was, of course, perfectly proper and natural for the Cabinet to defer such a decision in the absence of the Foreign Secretary, and I did not intend my words to carry any other meaning. But there had been so much talking to the press that some journalists - and certainly George Brown himself, when he heard about it - concluded that I was making it clear that he was in favour of arms sales."[1] Certainly Wilson's statement to the Commons was unfortunate to say the least.

[1] Wilson, op. cit., p. 599.

The battle continued over the weekend with such highlights as the Frost television probe in which Alan Lee Williams and Reginald Paget were two Labour M.P.s supporting Healey and Brown against Ben Whitaker who opposed the resumption of sales.[1] The Party was torn between those who would be prepared to sell the arms to avert the possibility of cuts in the social services, and those who thought it was necessary to take a moral stand against any gesture of support for a regime that prospered on the moral evil of apartheid.

Lord George-Brown later wrote that " during the weekend the press publicity, the leaking and the briefing continued, and by Monday morning it was pretty evident that it was no longer possible for a balanced argument to take place. Mr. Healey and myself, who had jointly submitted the original memorandum and recommendation, and those others who were originally in favour of supplying these limited arms, had become a pretty small minority, and we were no longer able to carry our colleagues with us."[2]

Whatever the pros and cons of the decision itself, the most dramatic effect that resulted from it arose from the way in which the matter had been discussed, and the manner in which the Cabinet reached its final verdict. It has been suggested that Cabinet Ministers who shifted their position during the month were persuaded to do so by Wilson, who argued that arms sales would have to be dropped for the sake of the Party. It was an argument that was acceptable to men like Gordon Walker.

As Wilson recalls, "In the event the Cabinet decided overwhelmingly against resuming arms supply, and agreed unanimously to the draft of the statement I had insisted should be made repudiating the stories which had been given to the press. At 3.30 p.m., after questions, I made the

[1] A B.B.C. television programme, December 16th, 1967.

[2] Brown, G., op. cit., p. 173.

comprehensive statement we had agreed."[1]

Labour Ministers, however, saw the whole question as being 'more about leadership' than as an attempt by a minority to foist an unpalatable policy on the Government in a bid to stave off such unattractive domestic measures as the reintroduction of charges for medical prescriptions - the issue over which Wilson had ostensibly resigned in 1951.

The arms to South Africa fracas focused attention on the real struggle in the leadership of the Labour Government, and the need for government by consent, and with the support of certain sectors of the Parliamentary Labour Party. This issue also related to Britain's imperial past; the use of naval facilities in South Africa was politically unacceptable to the anti-apartheid lobby within the Labour Party.

Harold Wilson's performance during the consideration of the arms sales question is understandable if his weak position as leader at that time is taken into account. He appeared, however, to have a paranoid streak. He was considerably influenced by his Paymaster General, George Wigg. Wigg had organized the campaign which got Wilson the leadership of the Party. Wigg's incessant burrowing and questioning had unearthed the Profumo scandal which seriously affected the image of the Conservative Party in the early 1960s. Wilson also felt he could talk freely to Wigg, since he did not fear him as a rival. Wilson's relations with senior Cabinet colleagues was never as close.

Under Wigg's influence Wilson had over-reacted to the alleged misuse of D notices (by which the Press voluntarily agreed not to publish certain matters considered by the Government to affect national security).

Wilson deliberately ignored the collective advice of his senior colleagues. He organized the Cabinet Committee system so that he alone knew all of what was happening.

[1] Wilson, H., op. cit., pp. 601-602.

Through his contact with junior ministers Wilson was able to keep a close eye on what their chiefs were doing. He also placed his own men as juniors in the important Ministries, often against the wishes of the Minister, so that he would receive reliable reports. By knowing all, and keeping his top colleagues ill-informed, Wilson hoped to divide and rule.

By his behaviour over the question of arms sales, however he antagonized important Cabinet colleagues, and they organized themselves so that Wilson was forced to listen. His senior colleagues demanded a greater say on economic policy. Ministers with a knowledge of economics and - like Healey - able to master a brief, wanted more control over strategic economic policy. Wilson now had to agree to have a more powerful version of the Steering Committee for Economic Policy set up after the economic crisis of July 1966.

When Wilson later went to Nigeria, in a bid to settle the civil war there, boosting his image as international statesman and peacemaker, Crossman, Healey, Jenkins and Peart organized an inner Cabinet, because they thought there was a need for a more effective strategy on such measures as the Constituency Boundaries Bill and industrial relations. Upon his return Wilson accepted this.

It was too late to be of practical value, however, and the introduction of the Industrial Relations Bill was hopelessly out of touch with the mood of the House of Commons, as lobby correspondent Peter Jenkins showed in his book.[1] Douglas Houghton, chairman of the P.L.P., organized the opposition to the Bill, and tried to rally support

[1] Jenkins, Peter, The Battle of Downing Street.

for Healey as an alternative leader of the Party if Wilson fell.

Robert Mellish, the Chief Whip, told the Cabinet that their Bill would fall if put to the vote in the Commons. Wilson's colleages deserted him, although Healey continued to support him, believing that it would be demoralizing to drop the Bill at this stage. The time for drastic institutional reform had passed, however, and the weakness stemming from the delayed devaluation left Wilson with no option but to await the promised economic miracle.[1]

As a necessary part of that 'economic miracle' Chancellor Jenkins sought to restrain public spending in December 1967/January 1968. In the battle over the cuts in Government expenditure Healey nearly left the Cabinet.

The struggle over the proposed cancellation of the F-111 was almost unrivalled in intensity and importance during the Labour Government's period in office.

The F-111 was to be sacrificed in a package deal, partly so that the left wing of the Party would accept swingeing social service cuts and partly to help cut total Government spending. As Crosland put it - 'They went round the table saying "What can you give?" If somebody said "I am not offering anything" then the others would say "I am not unless you are". You had to have a sacred cow from every department - school-leaving age, for example, from Education."[2]

The decision to defer raising the school-leaving age was important for a number of reasons. Lord Longford resigned in protest from his

[1] See Beckerman, W., op. cit.

[2] In conversation with the author.

position as Leader of the House of Lords. The decision represented the defeat of a policy many Labour supporters felt was an important social advance. It was a measure at the heart of socialist philosophy - to help the less privileged members of society.

The change had been pressed by Crosland, an important philosopher in the Labour movement, when he had been Secretary of State for Education. He was thus strongly in favour of the proposal, as being essential to the programme of any socialist government. The Labour Party did, in fact, emphasize in later propaganda that one of their major achievements was to spend more on education than on defence.

The attitude of other members of the Cabinet, however, was illuminating. Crosland's supporters included Callaghan, Brown, Stewart, Marsh, and Gunter. The opposition included some of the better educated members of the Cabinet, Castle, Wedgwood Benn, Healey, Crossman and the Education Minister, Gordon Walker, who thought it the least harmful cut.

Stewart was so convinced that there should be no question of going back on the earlier commitment to raising the school-leaving age that he nearly resigned. Only the intervention of a Cabinet colleague seems to have dissuaded him.

George Brown described the decision to postpone the extra schooling as being made for 'a ludicrously small and highly dubious saving of money'. He states: "I thought it was one of the greatest betrayals a Labour Government so overwhelmingly composed of university graduates could make of the less privileged people who, after all, had elected it."[1]

Healey, who found himself arguing against Stewart and Brown, did not see it as a matter of principle at the core of Labour's political philosophy, but thought that the priorities in education were in other areas.

[1] Brown, G., op. cit., p. 224.

Other Ministers, fearing cuts from their own departments, also voted with Healey. For Brown it was the high point of a series of Cabinet setbacks, and he resigned from his position as Foreign Secretary and Deputy Leader of the Labour Party two months later, on 15th March.[1] In his memoirs he writes that he was less affected by the decisions which the Government had taken, than by the way in which they were taken.

Harold Wilson's influence over such men as Gordon-Walker, the Education Minister, who had put up no fight when the proposal to scrap the raising of the school-leaving age was discussed, showed also in the debate on the cancellation of the F-111. Healey fought for it, not as a 'sacred cow' but as something he needed for the newly-envisaged European role. Although the R.A.F. had concentrated on the immense ferry range, the F-111 was a low-level advanced strike-aircraft, and had always been suitable for use in Europe.

The fight within the Cabinet, however, as Taverne said, 'was really a battle between Roy and Denis'.[2]

Healey himself said "I nearly won on the first discussion in Cabinet. Cancellation might never have taken place if Harold hadn't won over two weaklings."[3] Healey argued that the F-111 was vital to Britain's defence needs. His opponents, led by Wilson and Jenkins, said that for economic reasons alone it had to be cancelled.

After the first meeting of the Cabinet, where Healey lost by only one vote, he decided to raise the subject again. Tavern explained, ''Denis saw Frank Pakenham (Lord Longford) as the weak member. He arranged for him to be visited at the House of Lords. He was swung round in favour.''[4]

1 ibid.

2 Richard Taverne in conversation with the author.

3 ibid.

4 ibid

Longford saw Air Chief Marshal Sir Charles Elworthy, to find out if it was really important to Britain's total defence effort. He explained: "I had very little information on which to make up my mind - we did not have very much information in Cabinet - so I asked to see an expert."[1] Though he had voted for ending the role for the F-111, but he added: "After a three quarters of an hour's talk you can't pretend that your knowledge is very big".[2]

In the second vote he supported Healey because 'defence spending was coming down", and Healey had convinced him that Britain would be virtually naked without the F-111. Lord Longford said that - 'The vital vote was taken on a totally inadequate basis , and added that Wedgwood Benn, for example, after examining all the technological arguments in favour, had exclaimed - " I will probably vote against it", without explaining why.[3]

In spite of winning over Lord Longford, Healey was out-flanked. The economizers had won over Patrick Gordon-Walker and Cledwyn Hughes. The case had been carried at the Chancellor's push. Healey explained: " Roy was brilliant in presenting his case. He staked his reputation publicly at the beginning of post-devaluation to A., ending East of Suez, and B., dropping the F-111. He always had it in for the F-111 because he had fought to keep the TSR-2. And he took the line, "I don't mind cancelling TSR-2, providing we don't replace it."[4]

What had amazed Healey at the outset of the review of policy was the Press story that the F-111 was about to be cancelled - put about

[1] Lord Longford in conversation with the author.

[2] ibid.

[3] ibid.

[4] In conversation with author.

by the Prime Minister well before the Cabinet had taken a decision on it. Healey therefore campaigned hard for support against the Prime Minister and very nearly won the day.

Healey's attempt to reverse the first F111 Cabinet meeting decision took place over a hectic weekend.

Yet the cancellation of the F111 did not surprise either the American Embassy in London or McNamara, the U.S. Defence Secretary. Britain had bought the F111 because she thought she had a need for it, not because of super-salesmanship by the Americans. McNamara was grateful, because it helped him defend his policy against critics. But he was doubtful whether Britain had the resources to stay East of Suez, and said so to close friends - although he argued with Britain throughout that they should remain in the Far East, and suggested that American support for sterling would be dependent on Britain staying there.[1]

The 1964-5 review of Britain sent by the American Embassy in London to the State Department said it was unlikely that Britain could afford to stay East of Suez; and if Washington wanted them to stay then they should offer some kind of payment.[2]

The decision to withdraw from East of Suez by the end of 1971 was far more damaging to Britain's relations with the Americans than the F111 cancellation. Britain's influence declined from the moment the decision was announced.

The Government was now determined to act as if Britain's European military capability could serve as a powerful political weapon.

[1] Policies of Power, op. cit., p. 242.

[2] ibid.

Mr. Healey reminded the House that the "formidable contribution we shall be able to make to the Alliance in the 1970s may be as important politically as it is militarily."[1] The Defence Secretary elaborated, "Big changes are on the way in Europe. Whatever our hopes may be, it is not possible now to foresee the precise nature of our relationship with the Common Market in 1972. But what is certain is that our political relations with our European neighbours will be even more important than they are today, and that the scale and nature of our military contribution to their defence may exercise a more important influence on those relations than it has in the last 20 years".[2] Mr. Brown, too, thought the defence measures would "... make it easier for us to play a leading role in Europe..."[3]

The Government's belief that it might have a greater say in determining the outcome of international matters if it were in the E.E.C. was not without a certain logic, if only because its actual influence was so inconsiderable. Its capacity to influence the settlement of the Vietnam war had been minimal; its influence in the Middle East six-day war had been no greater although, according to George Brown, it might have been greater if Britain had forced the straits of Tiran with the help of the U.S. Navy. Britain could not even affect the outcome of the hostilities or secure a continuing flow of oil; in Africa too, Britain could expect little future influence as long as the Rhodesian affair remained unresolved.

Above all, though, the Government was committed to the doctrine that there could be no real improvement in influence for Britain unless

[1] Vol. 757, H. of C., 25th January, 1968, Cols. 625-6.

[2] Vol. 757, H. of C., 25th January, 1968, Col. 626. The Defence White Paper made the point. "We shall thus be able to contribute to the security of NATO on a scale corresponding with our efforts to forge closer political and economic links with Europe". Statement on Defence Estimate, February 1968, Cmnd. 3540., p.3.

[3] Vol. 757, H. of C., 25th January, 1968, Col. 636.

and until she had a strong balance of payments. It consequently put its faith into getting into Europe and in attempting to restore Britain's ailing economy. A withdrawal from East of Suez, it was now advocated by the Cabinet, could achieve both. Indeed the Foreign Secretary revealing remarkable intellectual agility, in public if not in Cabinet, emphatically denied that Britain's world status would diminish as a result of withdrawal. "... our standing" he said "will not in the future depend upon our military presence. Increasingly in other ways, by trade, by aid, by cultural activities, our presence will be felt, and, I believe, felt even more strongly".[1]

[1] Labour Party Conference Report, 1967, p. 217.

CHAPTER XIII

THE GOVERNMENT AND THE LABOUR PARTY: THE PROTRACTED RECESSIONAL

While the Government was concerned about the effects of withdrawal on Britain's external position, it was more conscious of the possible effects of that decision on the Labour Party. Indeed internal pressures within the Labour Party had been increasing quite markedly. At the annual Conference held in Scarborough in 1967 - the scene of the great CND debate seven years earlier - composite resolution 49 called for a cut-back East of Suez. The resolution declared that whilst "this Conference records its appreciation of the Labour Government's efforts to reduce the nation's burden of overseas military expenditure, but considers that, in order to provide necessary relief to the balance of payments and ensure a more balanced and realistic pattern of external military commitments, this process must be accelerated especially in relation to military spending east of Suez. It believes that these actions will enable Britain to fulfil a new role, that of peace promoter, and will release resources for a more rapid economic deployment of the country".[1] Indeed the defence decisions were in part a response to internal party pressures. That a defence cut-back was inevitable if not desirable was due to the Government's decision to pursue an economic strategy that was certain to be overwhelmingly unpopular within an already dispirited and divided party.

This economic strategy was to combine not only cuts in public expenditure but also a statutory incomes policy and a harsh budget which could well lead to even greater unemployment.[2] Even in the relatively healthy economic climate of September 1967 it was being predicted that one million men could be out of work in the winter of 1968. The post-war settlement was over; full employment, price stability and restrained collective bargaining were to pass from view. To put it at its lowest, the Government calculated that the defence cuts would please the Party and possibly obscure other more objectionable

[1] Labour Party Conference Report, 1967, p.217.

[2] The Government's plan was to save in planned Government expenditure £255 million in 1968-9 and £440 million in 1969-70.

aspects of the January economic package.

It was the Left Wing, particularly the Tribune Group, of the Party which was incensed, not only at these measures, but at a general economic strategy which it considered was packaged by orthodox treasury officials in consultation with more sinister international bankers.[1] Mr. Jenkins' brand of frankness did little to defuse the situation. He had rebuked the Left for its impassioned denunciation of the infamous 'letter of intent' which his predecessor had sent to the International Monetary Fund after devaluation. "What about the so-called 'strings'?", he asked, "... it is ... the practice in arranging almost any form of financing. The lender wants to know the future intentions of the borrower for the management of his affairs. That is not unreasonable, and, indeed, it is in any event totally inevitable."[2] The Left was not amused. The 'strings' were neither desirable nore inevitable in its view.

The Left, then, was not appeased when the cuts in public expenditure were announced. Even worse it believed the cuts to be totally unnecessary. The Left claimed that there would have been no economic crisis if the first thing Labour had done had been to make heavy defence cuts including withdrawing from East of Suez. The angry mood of the Left, in fact, encouraged the *Economist* to claim that "... the Labour Party, both in Parliament and in the country, is once again on the point of disintegration...". It concluded that "... the crisis of confidence and discipline it now faces is graver than that caused by the desertions of 1931 or the ferocious quarrels over nuclear disarmament in 1960".[3] Even allowing for some exaggeration

[1] See general tenour of debate, Labour Party Conference Report, 4th October, 1967.

[2] Vol. 755, H. of C., 5th December, 1967, Col. 1198.

[3] Economist, Vol. 226, 9th March, 1968, p. 12.

there was little doubt that the Labour Party was in disarray.

The Party's distress could in part be attributed to its lack of electoral success. There was a feeling of despair, even before the previous September's Walthamstow by-election which had shown a swing of 18.4% to the Conservatives. Moreover, Harold Wilson was not the same dynamic, seemingly far-seeing leader who had exuded such confidence just eighteen months before.

The Government felt it wise to concentrate on party unity. The Labour Party since polling day in 1966 had been more rebellious than any Government since the war. It was true that Labour's record in this respect was unenviable: in July 1966 thirty two members had abstained over Vietnam: in August of the same year twenty-two members refused to support the prices and incomes bill, and in October 1966 there were twenty-eight abstentions over Part IV of the bill. In the following February sixty-two M.P.s rebelled against the Government's defence policy and in May thirty-six voted against the Common Market while fifty-one abstained. Just two months later came another revolt over the incomes policy.[1] It was hardly surprising therefore that the Prime Minister was overtly concerned with minimising the differences within his Party.

Not the least of the Prime Minister's growing anxieties was that, if the Left did rebel, the great bulk of the Party would almost virtually insist on the expulsion of those involved. It was even rumoured around the Palace of Westminster that such a situation might lead to the enforced resignation of the Prime Minister's 'own nominee', John Silkin,

[1] Wilson, H., op. cit.

the Chief Whip. In the event however the Left's reaction to the January measures was only mildly contentious. In the main it limited itself with uttering the painful cry of 'bankers ramp' that had been sparked off by the 'letter of intent'. Mr. Newens spoke for all his colleagues on the Left when he vehemently declared that the cuts were designed "... to meet the demands of the international bankers, of the speculators in sterling and of the most reactionary circles in this country and in the world".[1] Mr. Atkinson, showing equal anger to Mr. Newens, and even greater despair, in an emotional release of pent-up frustration, argued that the January measures and the March budget, would "... mean absolute disaster for the Labour movement".[2]

The costs of defence were not dispassionately quantified by the Left in terms of pounds, shillings and pence, but more emotively in terms of schools and hospitals. At the 1967 Party Conference Mr. Huzzard, of the Draughtsmen and Allied Technicians Association, pointed out to a cheering mass of party delegates, "We can have a choice in this country. The education school building programme has recently been pegged by the Government at £150 million a year, but the Singapore base is costing £200 million a year. One Polaris submarine and its base is costing £92 million, yet the annual cost of hospital building is only £83 million. One F111 aircraft.... costs £2.6 million and for this we can have five big comprehensive schools".[3] This rhetoric clearly pointed to the dilemma over priorities facing the Government. It also revealed the Left's unyielding commitment to social objectives.

[1] Vol. 756, H. of C., 17th January, 1968, Col. 1823.

[2] Vol. 761, H. of C., 20th March, 1968, Col. 487.

[3] Huzzard, R. (Draughtsmen and Allied Technicians Association).

The Left, in fact, far from being satisfied with the defence cuts insisted on more. According to Mr. Allaun, there was still "... plenty of fat on that carcass ..."[1] The Defence Minister was in no doubt about the Left's insatiable demands for defence cuts. He likened it to "... throwing herrings to a sea lion. It gulps them down and a second later is back asking for more."[2]

While it is clear that the Left's mild elation occasioned by the defence cuts did not entirely offset its disenchantment at the cuts in civil expenditure, it is without doubt obvious that its protest, and indeed the Party's protest, was a low-key affair compared with what it would have been if no defence cuts had been envisaged. The extent of the disaffection in the Lobby was a mere twenty-five abstentions over defence policy in January, while one month later thirty Labour M.P.s voted against the ending of free milk and twenty two voted against the increased cost of insurance stamps.

It was, of course, not merely a question of keeping the Left reconciled to government policies. For the effect of the Left Wing on the decision to withdraw from East of Suez was patently slight. It is possible to exaggerate the importance of the Left on this issue, but in fact the Government would have faced far more than just mild Left-wing dissent if the cuts in civil expenditure had not been accompanied by severe defence cuts.[3] According to *The Times* "the danger for the Government .... may not be Left wing votes, or even an ad hoc combination of centre M.P.s ... but the spread across the Parliamentary Party of a sense that they are being asked to betray

[1] Vol. 760, H. of C., 5th March, 1968, Col. 301.

[2] Vol. 755, H. of C., 27th November, 1967, Col. 68.

[3] Mr. Lee Kuan Yew was convinced that the withdrawal decision was induced by internal political clashes within the Labour Party. See Philip Darby, op. cit., p. 325.

much that they had stood for".[1] This was perfectly valid and disquiet about the Government came from all sections of the Party.

Government Ministers met this alarming situation in different ways; while Mr. Healey revealed an ability to shadow-box, Mr. Brown faced every issue head-on. The evidence of evasiveness or a strong desire of the Defence Minister to avoid defining the strategic issues involved in a withdrawal from East of Suez came in the defence debate in early March. With the House intent on concentrating its energies on the East of Suez controversy, Mr. Healey spent the greater part of his very long and tedious speech illuminating the technicalities of anti-ballistic missile defence. Ministers had the unenviable task of explaining the cuts without dealing with the economic policies which had made them inevitable. Mr. Healey, moreover, genuinely felt the timing of the withdrawal decision to be an error and he was never very convincing in defending that schedule. Indeed, there was the classic parliamentary set-piece battle with the curious sight of Mr. Healey, who disagreed with the decision, defending it stubbornly, and Mr. Powell who agreed with the decision, revealing its deficiencies with forensic brilliance.

Nevertheless despite Mr. Healey's personal discomforture, the Government made a credible defence of its policies, especially within its own Party. The Government's case was ill-thought out if basically correct, but in the event it acquired a certain resilience simply because its opponents were divided on the best line of attack. The Government played on its critics' weaknesses and divisions. The

[1] The Times, 12th January, 1968.

cuts, both civil and military, it said, were 'unavoidable' and a necessary exercise in 'realism'. The Left and the anti-East of Suez group were informed by the Ministers concerned that there was to be no absolute cut in civil expenditure and that, since defence cuts would not impinge for some time, the Government could not "... possibly have avoided civil cuts by making bigger defence cuts".[1] The pro-East of Suez Lobby, on the other hand, were informed that the losses suffered by the anti-East of Suez Lobby were much greater and far-reaching than had been widely recognized. Indeed, the essence of the Government's case was that all should take comfort from the losses of each other - that there should be a sense of shared misery.

The Government constantly developed this theme that no one had been spared and that the cuts were evenly spread between departments. "If everyone of the 630 members" said Mr. Stewart "was asked exactly what package he or she would have constructed, no two members would produce exactly the same packages. We weighed up what we believed was right in general and commended it to the House. But it must be commended as a package".[2] This was only one of repeated Government efforts to persuade the Party to look at the measures as a whole. The Prime Minister also intervened, asking his Party, "... to look at the package as a whole and not select one item..."[3] Mr. Fred Willey was unimpressed, "If I buy 1 lb. of apples" he said "from a greengrocer and he gives me a bag in which there is a rotten apple, I cannot appreciate the argument that, because it is 1 lb., I must accept it as a whole".[4]

[1] Jenkins, R., Vol. 756, H. of C., 17th January, 1968, Col. 1798.

[2] Vol. 759, H. of C., 20th February, 1968, Col. 361.

[3] Vol. 756, H. of C., 16th January, 1968, Col. 1600.

[4] Vol. 756, H. of C., 18th January, 1968, Col. 2028.

Nevertheless the argument that all had been hurt equally in the package did soothe to some extent the ruffled feathers within the Party.

Mr. Brown explained with great feeling just how painful the horse trading had been, "... in facing the current decisions there have been for all of us in the Cabinet hard personal moments. Each of us has seen a cherished view threatened and has been obliged to reconcile himself to a course which, ideally, he would have sought to avoid".[1] Mr. Crossman's detailed account tellingly indicates the real extent of the Cabinet's division and confusions. He noted in his diary that the schedule for withdrawal was, to begin with, somewhat confusing. Indeed, he wrote, a "point of interest arose out of a minute I had circulated on the timetable of the Defence White Paper. On reading the draft I had jumped to the conclusion that our announcement of the phased withdrawal was carefully planned to run right up to the last day - December 31st, 1971, whereas all we were committed to was a withdrawal by the last day of 1971 and we might be out two or three years earlier if we wanted it. I saw here a trick under which the defence Departments were transforming a last possible day into the only day for withdrawal. George Brown was on my side and said he wanted to be quite sure that he could be out of the Gulf much earlier. Denis Healey said that he had to make his plans and phase them over a definite period. Then the P.M. said that we must draw a distinction about the timetable for our withdrawal and the plans for the run-down of the forces consequent on our withdrawal. This sounded better than it worked out. But I was satisfied because I achieved an absolutely clear statement in the minutes:

[1] Vol. 756, H. of C., 18th January, 1968, Col. 2082.

'On the timing of our withdrawal we should not go beyond what has already been announced since this gave us the flexibility to withdraw earlier should the opportunity arise'. This is the kind of small difference a non-departmental Minister can occasionally make."[1]

In the Cabinet itself the anti-East of Suez faction was powerful and entrenched.

Mr. Healey, however, did not concede the East of Suez role without a fight. The Defence Minister was able to call on the support of both Mr. Callaghan and Mr. Brown, which was rather surprising in view of their former posts, and also on Mr. Richard Marsh and the pro-European Mr. George Thomson, but he had lost the support of the Prime Minister. In the event Mr. Healey's only success was to wring out of the Cabinet an acceptance of a further nine months before withdrawal.

If the withdrawal decision were to be assessed solely on whether it preserved Cabinet unity or not, it would be proper to have to conclude that it was a success. Miss Jennie Lee - a Left-winger by temperament and marriage - even publicly admitted that the reason she had not resigned over prescription charges was because the defence cuts were "real, drastic and permanent."[2] There were certainly others in a similar position who were less willing to speak out. Only Lord Longford resigned.

There were possibly other political reasons for the decision to withdraw from East of Suez by 1971. Although it is difficult if not impossible to be certain, it might well have been the Government's intention to present any new Administration with a fait accompli.

[1] Crossman, R., Vol. II, op. cit., p. 682.

[2] Cited by Powell, E., H. of C., 18th January, 1968, Col. 1901.

Such action was in line with known Government practice. The last Conservative Administration had brought forward the Polaris programme for this reason, and when Labour cancelled the TSR-2 it even ensured action to destroy the jigs and tools despite Conservative pleas that it should not do so.[1] It is perhaps significant that the Cabinet's initial decision was to withdraw from East of Suez just five years after the 1966 election. Even the final decision itself virtually made certain that regardless of whether Labour won or lost the next election no real revival of the East of Suez role could take place.[2]

While the economic and political reasons for the accelerated withdrawal were widely debated, much less attention was given to the strategic logic behind the decision. In fact there were compelling strategic arguments for withdrawing in 1971 rather than 1975, and in not having a special East of Suez capability after that date. Not the least inconsiderable of these arguments was that a definite decision, however unpopular, would at least end the period of uncertainty that had included five re-appraisals of the role of the Services since Labour had taken office. Mr. Healey, although opposed to the withdrawal decision, later admitted that he was not too unhappy at the chance it offered to break out of the self-perpetuating cycle where expectations of defence cuts affected recruitment, which in turn led to more defence cuts.

The manpower shortage in fact had reached such a critical level that it was by no means clear that even if the East of Suez role remained politically and economically viable, it would be militarily possible for very much longer. The Under Secretary of State for Defence for the Royal

[1] See Vol. 760, H. of C., 7th March, 1968, Col. 704.

[2] The Conservatives under Mr. Heath in fact promised to reverse the withdrawal decision. But this commitment was purely cosmetic.

Navy, Mr. Foley, admitted that the "... Defence reviews and all that these involve have had their effect on recruitment and re-engagement. It would be idle to deny it. In the last few months we have been fighting an uphill battle on recruitment".[1]

Some time later in a lecture at the R.U.S.I. Mr. Healey also argued that "... in the future in many areas manpower will be as severe a constraint as money on a Defence Minister's freedom of action".[2] In 1970 on television, Mr. Healey again argued that if Britain had retained all her East of Suez commitments it would have been "quite impossible to meet the manpower bill".[3] It was not unlikely then, even in January 1968, that the Government was aware of the great strain that the East of Suez role might put on Service manpower in the future. Resource constraint was in fact a growing factor in planning defence allocation and ensuring a definite level of capability.

The January decision not only ameliorated the uncertainty within the Services, but also removed the confusion facing Britain's allies. This was significant because one of the more persuasive criticisms levelled at the July measures had been that they were sufficiently ambiguous, both in defining when Britain would withdraw and in describing what East of Suez capability she would then have, to encourage the East of Suez nations to continue to rely on Britain.

Although the January measures were in some respects still unclear, the situation was a good deal better than before. Britain's weakness was

1 Vol. 760, H. of C., 11th March, 1968, Col. 1116. Mr. Reynolds conceded that the army was in a similar position. He explained that recruitment was ".. below that needed to meet the annual recruitment of 35,000 to maintain a steady state". Vol. 767, H. of C., 24th June, 1968, Col. 24. He also said that on 31st March 1968 that the soldier strength of the Army was 4543 below ceiling. Vol. 767, H. of C., 25th June, 1968, Col. 60.

2 Lecture to Royal United Services Institution, 22nd October, 1969.

3 24 Hours (a BBC television programme), 5th March, 1970.

transparently plain. Even the transport fleet, hitherto the basis of the mobile strategic reserve, was to be cut back. There was also the cancellation of the F111 (discussed earlier) which Mr. Healey admitted would "... limit the variety of circumstances in which we can usefully intervene outside Europe after our withdrawal". The Defence Minister went on to say that "Our allies are well aware of the nature of this limitation".[1]

The weakness of the July measures had not been only that they might unwittingly mislead Britain's local allies, but that they might also place Britain in a particularly exposed position. Mr. Mayhew had warned earlier that Britain's forces would be in greater danger in the period "... between 1971 and 1975 when our commitments will reach their maximum ambiguity, and our troops their maximum weakness".[2] The former Navy Minister was not alone in extolling the virtues of a more hasty retreat. Mr. Jenkins too, suggested that "... all our recent history shows that, when it has to be done, it is best done reasonably quickly..."[3]

Once the Cabinet had reached agreement on the need for more drastic defence savings it was inevitable that the East of Suez role would be abandoned. This was for two reasons. First, Mr. Healey was unwilling to allow any further cut in capability without a corresponding cut in commitment. Immediately after the cuts he proclaimed this doctrine rather emphatically "... I have made certain that as capability is cut, commitments are reduced accordingly".[4] Second, there was no intention of

[1] Vol. 657, H. of C., 25th January, 1968, Col. 628.

[2] Vol. 751, H. of C., 27th July, 1967, Col. 1071.

[3] Vol. 756, H. of C., 17th January, 1968, Col. 1797.

[4] Vol. 757, H. of C., 25th January, 1968, Col. 633. The Prime Minister made the same point. "We are determined", he said, "that our commitments, and capacities of our force to undertake them, should match and balance each other". Vol. 756, H. of C., 16th January 1968, Col. 1582.

cutting the European commitment and leaving intact the East of Suez one. "Above all none of us on this side of the House" said the Defence Minister, "has ever believed that, important as our contribution outside Europe might be, it should never take precedence over our contribution to peace in Europe. For the foundation of Britain's security is today, as it has been for the past 1,000 years, the maintenance of peace in Europe".[1] There could be no more precise statement of the overwhelming dominance of Europe in British foreign and defence policy. Mr. Healey concluded "The result is that, whenever economic pressures have forced us to reduce our spending on defence, we have had to look for the consequent reductions in our military effort outside, not inside Europe".[2] NATO had waited nearly twenty years for a British Government to make such a declaration.[3]

It was, moreover, clear that the demands of European security were certain to impose even greater pressures on Britain's defence resources. Mr. Healey informed the House that "President Johnson's recent statement on the need to reduce American spending overseas may well foreshadow some reduction in America's military contribution on this side of the Atlantic ... I believe that if America is to retain her essential commitment to the defence of Western Europe in the 1970s we on this side of the Atlantic will have to be more self reliant in defence than we have been in the 1960s".[4] The Defence Minister also underlined that the withdrawal from East of Suez would allow for the "... concentration of the British Navy in the European theatre ...", which would "... make

[1] Vol. 757, H. of C., 25th January, 1968, Col. 622.

[2] Vol. 759, H. of C., 25th January, 1968, Col. 622.

[3] Crisis in European Defence, op. cit., p. 174.

[4] Vol. 757, H. of C., 25th January, 1968, Col. 626.

possible a powerful strengthening of NATO's southern flank at a time when the threat to peace may appear to be increasing there".[1] These were powerful strategic reasons for a greater effort in Europe and for disengagement from East of Suez. Of course there was much self-deception involved as well but in general the Cabinet took the view that Britain's withdrawal from East of Suez would enable a better re-deployment of scarce resources for the European role.

The withdrawal decision however appeared to be 70% economic, 20% political and 10% strategic. And yet such a contention in reality obscures the complexities of the decisions taken. To quantify or measure a decision in this way gives it a simplicity and an inevitability and not to say a wisdom, it basically lacks. It is notoriously difficult to separate the variables involved. For instance, it has been argued most vehemently that the withdrawal decision was made because of the desire to maintain party cohesion, and that this was a political imperative. Party unity, however, was only a residual factor because it was being undermined by the Government's introduction of unpopular economic measures. In this variable the decision has a direct political explanation, and an indirect economic one. It cannot simply be attributed to either. However despite these difficulties certain tentative conclusions seem valid.

In any consideration of Government decision-making at this level it is necessary to look not only at those factors which actually explain a decision, but also at those factors which the Government in the last analysis has to disregard. One of the most curious and remarkable features

[1] Vol. 757, H. of C., 25th January, 1968, Col. 627. Mr. Mayhew also made out a strong case for a greater naval contribution in Europe, arguing that fighting between Russia and the West "... is more likely to break out at sea than on land" and that a continuing presence East of Suez "... would diminish our presence in the Mediterranean, in the South Atlantic and at Simonstown...". Vol. 760, H. pf C., 114, March, 1968, Col. 1031.

of the withdrawal decision was that the Government finally disregarded what was conceptually speaking a very strong case against withdrawal. Its fear of instability East of Suez, its hesitation at abandoning its allies and its anxieties about Britain's declining world status, were instead massively overwhelmed by other strategic, economic and political arguments.

Political decisions are in the last resort, though as much about individual decision-makers, as about issues. If different decision-makers had been in power it is not improbable that very different decisions would have been taken;[1] although a somewhat deterministic interpretation is possible given the constraints imposed by Britain's secular economic decline. The key man was, not surprisingly, the Prime Minister himself. This was not only because of his enormous personal power, but also because it was his change of view about the World Role, occurring some time after devaluation, that really brought about its eventual demise. Not surprisingly the change in Mr. Wilson's position was accompanied by similar changes in the positions of some of his less independently-minded colleagues. Of course Mr. Wilson was in a sense reacting to changes in socio-economic-strategic conditions as well as perceiving their inter-relationship.

All through his political career Harold Wilson had shown an obsessive regard for the power the Labour Party could command rather than for the principles and objectives that power would allow a Labour Government to achieve. His obsession with party unity fitted into this pre-occupation. This was dramatically illustrated at that time of intense intra-party crisis in the late 1950s and early 1960s when Labour's former leader

[1] See an interesting discussion of both the rational actor and decision-maker approach in Allison, Graham, Essence of Decision: explaining the Cuban missile crisis, 1971, p. 5. He describes three models, National actor or "classical" model; Organizational Process Model; and a Governmental (Bureaucratic) Politics model. His use of the term is roughly the equivalent of "conceptual scheme or framework".

Mr. Gaitskell insisted on raising the issues associated with Labour's clause four and nuclear policies. Harold Wilson at the 1960 Scarborough Conference opposed Hugh Gaitskell not because he thought him to be in error, but because he thought that defence raised issues which need not be debated and would, if brought into the open, lead to the fragmentation of the Party. Mr. Wilson's criticism of his leader was not one of principle and not of doctrinal deviation. He is reputed to have asserted at the time of the unilateral disarmament debate that he could "draft out at least seven defence policies on which the Party could unite".[1]

It was anyway manifest that in 1968 Mr. Wilson was desperately anxious not to antagonise the doctrinaire faction of the Party in the way his predecessor had done. On several celebrated occasions he revealed himself willing to upset Cabinet colleagues in order to appease the Left. The Prime Minister, in fact, never lost contact with the Left. Often to the chagrin of his loyalists (the residual heirs of Labourism and of social democratism) he would spend many hours informally talking to his most fervent and persistent critics among the 'utopians' and 'scientific socialists'.

Mr. Jenkins was also a key figure in the withdrawal decisions. Indeed Dick Taverne described the fight within the Cabinet as simply a battle royal between the Treasury and the Minister of Defence. Furthermore Crossman confirms that such a set-piece battle did also involve Departmental interests.[2] Although we have already looked at the part the Chancellor played, one can add that Mr. Jenkins was successful because he was intellectually equipped for the intense in-fighting and maneouvering that characterised the final decision.[3] This was in contrast to Mr. Healey who was not a 'fighting Minister'. He could

[1] Haseler, S., op. cit., p. 61.

[2] Denis Healey and the Policies of Power, op. cit., p. 195.

[3] Of course within the Departmental negotiated order the Treasurey is supreme in its clash with Ministry of Defence. To date the Treasury has yet to be worsted. See Williams, Geoffrey The Ten-Year Rule and British Rearmament (unpublished MA thesis, London University) 1975, pp. 8-15.

put a case forcibly enough, but would never push his argument to the point of rupture when things did not look like going his way. This was not the case with Mr. Brown who frequently threatened to resign;[1] but the Foreign Secretary was really only a half-hearted supporter of the World Role. While he never accepted the facile East of Suez-European dichotomy, he was well aware that other powerful European statesmen did. His advocacy of the World Role in consequence revealed much ambiguity and the erratic volatility that characterised a great part of his political work. Mr. Crossman also, despite his brilliant analytical gifts, was a relative failure as a Minister. His influence on defence was also minimal. He was conscripted by Harold Wilson for service on the defence sub-committee of the Cabinet (DOPC) but his contribution was that of the grand inquisitor.[2]

Of course, the Government can be criticised for the substance of the January decision, but it is more difficult to criticise it for the manner in which the decision was taken. The Government itself was not doctrinaire and did not take the decision without considerable thought. There were at least five intensely fought Cabinet meetings before the final decision. It should also be remembered that the countries affected by the decision were all consulted rather than just informed. Mr. Brown went to the United States. Mr. Thomson went to the Far East and Goronwy Roberts visited the Persian Gulf. No Cabinet decision was taken until the views of Britain's allies were assessed and in the event the decision was materially affected by those views.

[1] Brown, G., op. cit. p.173

[2] Crossman, Vol. I., op. cit., p.70. George Wigg however wrote that Crossman was "of mighty wit and little wisdom". See Wigg, G., op. cit., p. 341.

There were, though, some unfortunate aspects of the decision. The most unfortunate aspect was that the East of Suez issue was disfigured by considerations of party susceptibilities and in consequence it became almost impossible to do justice to the intricate strategic arguments involved. It was on this occasion almost inevitable that this issue was decided not solely on its own merits, but by factors which were not strictly relevant. Considerations of party unity should not have had such preponderence over matters of supreme importance.

The Government also acted in an indecisive manner. If defence cuts were so critical to Britain's economic viability why were they not taken immediately after devaluation or at least foreshadowed at that time? Instead the Government promised that no such cuts would be made and thus, in the event, suffered a greater loss of face and left itself open to the charge that its word could not even be trusted one month to another.

Although the Government's decision to leave both the Persian Gulf and South-East Asia gave the withdrawal a coherence and a strategic rationale, its decision to retain a general capability was both contradictory and confusing. This evidence of indecisiveness was perhaps of more fundamental significance because it signified a nation in decline. Ebbing national power often leads to a precipitate and foolish deployment of weapons systems and strategic postures which would earlier have been dismissed as irrelevant if not pernicious acquisitions. The concept of a general capability was just part of a more widespread self-deception which spread right up to the nuclear level.

There are other aspects of the January decision worthy of discussion and analysis, but these can be more properly assessed within the wider context of the whole process of withdrawal which started when Labour took office in 1964. Although the January 1968 decision will stand as a major turning point in British foreign policy, it should not really be divided from the events of the preceding three years. It was in the last analysis only the final decision in a long series of lesser decisions. Having examined the elements separately it is now time to look at the decision as a whole.

CHAPTER XIV

THE TRIUMPH OF THE IDEOLOGY OF LABOURISM AND THE WITHDRAWAL FROM EAST OF SUEZ

In the general election of June 1970, Labour was defeated. Mr. Wilson, who had presided over the nation's affairs ever since Labour had first assumed office some six years earlier, returned to the Opposition front-benches - perhaps to deliberate on the momentous changes in foreign and defence policy which he had both wittingly and unwittingly introduced.[1] In this deliberation he was not alone. There is no doubt about the lasting relevance of his decisions, although some confusion about how they related to a broader foreign policy perspective, and inevitably also criticisms emerged about the way in which they were made. In fact, the Labour Government could claim very little credit for the way in which withdrawal from East of Suez was accomplished.

The post-war epoch has been necessarily a period when traditional British defence policies were re-formulated fortuitously which inevitably implies a process of trial and error. This process reached its apotheosis under Labour in the mid-1960s and probably accelerated more quickly because Britain had a Labour, and not a Conservative, Government. In essence though it was a long term phenomenon; these painful decisions were those that any Government would have at first contemplated, and then introduced. No political Party can alter the nature of the international environment, although it is clear that the Labour Government did learn pragmatically to live with it in a multiplicity of ways and with varying degrees of realism.[2] Labour was no more or less pragmatic than the Conservatives

[1] In his book - A Record of the Labour Government - he does provide some evidence of considered retrospection though not much. Mr. Wilson's second book The Governance of Britain is more analytical and for the student of politics more useful.

[2] Obviously political parties adjust to environmental changes less quickly than governments seeking to grapple with the consequences of environmental change.

who prided themeselves on having no ideological fixations. Both parties in fact articulate and aggregate the interests of a pluralist liberal-democratic society. Labour both in power and opposition gave expression to the broad and conflicting interests of a liberal-democratic-interest-dominated political process. This required the techniques of crisis management rather than the application of rigid political principles to the unpredictable and chaotic nature of events in both the internal and external environments within which nation-states seek to exist. Such political principles which were and are applied were those consistent with the ideology of liberal-democracy and with a Labour Government the emphasis given to policy reflected a greater commitment to an expanded concept of social democracy with more participation if not by the masses, then, through organized groups. However by the time Labour came to power Britain's secular economic decline was far advanced. The seeds of internal political fragmentation had also already been sown. Britain was no longer a great military power. A major environmental change had occurred.

Be that as it may, no aspect of Britain's defence policy had declined since the war more comprehensively than her overseas role. We can identify four main reasons for this. First, environmental factors - such as the growth and spread of nationalism and the growing hostility expressed by small nations towards any intervention from the great powers: second, value changes - an example of which would be the diminishing value attached to a Western military presence, and the loss of imperial will: and third, capability changes - the most obvious of which was the enormous military strength of the superpowers and possibly China, and the continuing economic decline and military overstretch of Britain; four, the dramatic impact of technological innovation. The East of

Suez role has been particularly influenced by all four factors, being a commitment in fact remote from the British homeland.

Nevertheless Labour emphatically did not come into office with any real intention to radically challenge Britain's foreign policy or to end the East of Suez role. On the contrary when it came into office in late 1964, it seemed certain to follow the orthodox and well established policies of successive British Governments. Continuity of policy was inevitable. Labour's top leadership indeed regarded such continuity as almost desirable because they felt confident that they could make a better job in pursuing Britain's traditional interests. Although it is possible to argue that Labour's foreign policy goals, as opposed to short-term objectives, centred on a very different view of international policies than those which the Conservative Party regarded as practicable and desirable.[1] Conceivably Labour believed that national policy should serve to transform the international system of states into a genuine international society of states. Thus Labour's commitment to the ideals of social democracy or those of a democratic socialist state revealed a more fundamental desire to transform the nature of the present international system. This deep underlying aspiration obviously and visibly conflicted with the inevitably limited character of policy in the short-run. Labour in office recognised the constraints imposed by the exercise of power in existing circumstances. But even then Labour appeared occasionally to recognise in opposition and more persistently in power, that international stability depended upon what Professor Bull describes as the entrenched "institutions of the society of states," the balance of power, international law, diplomacy, war and the great powers.[2]

[1] See concluding remarks of this thesis.

[2] The Anarchical Society, op. cit., introduction, xii.

In terms of policy, the only important difference therefore between the Parties was Labour's shrill insistence that Britain should castrate her nuclear independence and concentrate on making a greater conventional contribution to the Western alliance. In the event, however, even this difference soon diminished and then disappeared. This was not altogether unexpected, since Labour's elite ususally became more tentative on moving away from the radical influence of Party Conference and that of the National Executive Committee and into the more cautious environment of the 'departmental negotiated order' in Whitehall.[1] There was anyway an unshakable belief amongst Government Ministers that the traditional definition of Britain's 'national interests' was more or less about right and that Britain had sufficient power to sustain those interests. The East of Suez role, therefore, remained indisputably and indubitably safe while the Government retained a traditionalist image of national or permanent interests in its approach to foreign policy making (the object of which was to avoid foreclosing options) and in its assessment of national power.

This traditionalism was curiously reinforced, up to a point, by Labour's somewhat internationalist ideology and also by a feeling of obligation towards Britain's allies. This applied most strongly in regard to the Commonwealth, towards which Labour had a warm and genuinely sentimental and affectionate attachment. To a Party which

[1] See Barber, James. Who Makes British Foreign Policy?. Professor Barber argues that "the departmental negotiated order and the formal office holder perspectives share certain assumptions. He suggests six: (1) "Foreign policy making is essentially an activity of the executive arm of the government", (2)"Foreign policy involves specialist knowledge and access to a vast range of information, much of which is confidential and secret. Policy making therefore requires time, experience and knowledge which is only available to the executive", (3) "The general public has little knowledge of or interest in foreign affairs. Even if it had greater interest, it would be inappropriate to make policy more public because of the need for confidentiality and an agreed national viewpoint", (4) "Parties parliament and pressure groups only play a peripheral part in foreign policy making, (5) "There are no deep ideological divisions among the policy makers, and there is usually consensus on the 'national interest', (6) "in foreign policy making the executive not only responds to initiative from others and to changing circumstances, it also has an initiating role." p. 34.

was eager to claim responsibility for the birth of the New Commonwealth and to which the 'brotherhood of man' was not mere rhetoric but a fundamental tenet of faith for a substantial section of the Party, the protection of Commonwealth countries trying to foster relatively democratic forms was of some importance. This attitude was important because the ideology of Labourism was consistent with the long-term aspiration to see a transformation in the nature of international politics through the creation of a society of nation-states acting co-operatively and not in competition with each other over limited and diminishing resources.

Indeed, at first, the new Labour Government conceded greater prominence to the oceanic role than to the continental one. Its European policy was quietly but definitely shelved and B.A.O.R., far from being strengthened, was cut back. Nevertheless the Government revealed no desperate anxiety to choose between the two roles; it was supposed that they could co-exist as they had done in the past. It was supposed by Labour that the two strategies were basically complementary and it was just a question of attempting to reconcile them.

However, in due course the contradiction between Labour's declaratory and operational policies widened and by the end of 1966 the Government had been compelled to adopt a new position. Not only had the strategic, economic and political perspective of Europe increased at the expense of East of Suez, but the economic and political perspective had become of more immediate importance than the strategic one. This too worked in favour of Europe and against the East of Suez role, since the latter was essentially a military role.[1]

[1] The extent of the military character of the East of Suez role was examined in Chapter II (See Annex A, B and C).

And yet the Eurocentric posture of Labour's foreign and defence policies was not entirely convincing, let alone enthusiastically endorsed by the Party as a whole. The Party had no great love of the European movement. Labour voters, especially amongst manual workers, revealed a cultural hostility to a closer alignment with Europe.[1] Moreover, Britain had traditionally been unwilling to limit her interests to one single area - her foreign policy had consciously reflected the principle of overlapping circles. Nevertheless, under Labour this traditional diversity of effort and interest, the continental perspective and the imperial one, though still apparent, was less marked than before, and it seemed that all Britain's interests - strategic, political and economic - might slowly converge in just one area, Europe. Labour's re-orientation of policy would thus allow Britain to move closer to EEC-Europe or perhaps move in favour of a more detached role for Britain as Richard Crossman preferred.[2]

This historic shift in policy had both a negative and a positive aspect. It represented both a weariness and a certain unease with the post-imperial role and a growing, if muted, identity with Europe. It was, however, more of a swing away from East of Suez than a swing towards the Continent. This negative aspect of the decision stemmed from simultaneous and intersecting doubts about whether Britain had enough military capability to continue a World Role and also about the value of the East of Suez presence itself.[3]

[1] Linberg and Schingold, Europe's Would be polity, p. 257. Also see more recent evidence relating to the period after Britain joined the Community in The Times, August 13th, 1977, referring to an NUP survey which suggested that the"opposition to the EEC is found mainly among older people, manual workers and members of the Labour Party"

[2] Crossman, R., Vol. II op. cit.,

[3] Of course, the world role and the East of Suez one are not necessarily synonymous but in this analysis I distinguish between the world role, which depended upon being perceived by other actors as having a great power role within the international system, and the more limited imperial role associated with the legacy of Empire and the development of post-imperial connexions within the Commonwealth.

This doubt about the value of the role was inevitably strongest in the economic perspective of foreign policy making. Labour's term of office saw not only a growing disbelief that Britain's economic interests East of Suez could be protected by force, but also a continuing decline in Commonwealth trade. Indeed by 1967 few people were suggesting that Commonwealth trade could be dramatically increased. Those who disapproved of the European move suggested instead that Britain could either go it alone or could participate in a North Atlantic Free Trade Area.[1] Hardly anyone justified the Commonwealth links on economic grounds. As Leonard Beaton wrote "where British trade is concerned, the Commonwealth countries accepted the loss of preference implied in British accession to EFTA; and after expressing deep concern in 1962 over the consequences of facing the EEC tariff at British ports Commonwealth governments adapted to what they regarded as a British decision which ought to be respected."[2] Britain became openly doubtful about the utility of the Commonwealth.

The Government had similar doubts about the World Role on the political level. These doubts increased as Britain drifted from one military involvement or political crisis to another. There also existed a more pervasive frustration as Britain's influence became less and less effective in world politics and her relationship with the United States less and less central to basic strategic interests.[3]

The Eurocentric perspective of Labour's foreign and defence policies in terms of strategic interests still remained largely undefined however. It was clear that Labour was uncertain about the value and

[1] See Maxwell Stamp Associates, The Free Trade Area Option, November, 1967; also Beaton, Leonard, Commonwealth in a New Era, pp. 30-32.

[2] ibid. p. 30.

[3] The Permanent Alliance, op. cit. p. 213.

importance of a Western presence East of Suez and possibly resented being taken along by United States policy in Vietnam; but it was certainly not yet evident that Labour thought that Britain's strategic interests only lay in Europe. And yet the longer Labour remained in office grappling with intractable realities the stronger became its conviction that Europe was a vital 'national interest' and East of Suez only a peripheral one.

This changing perception of Britain's interests was in some respects curious. After all the East of Suez role was not only a strategic interest of some standing but it also arguably underpinned another of Britain's vital strategic interests - the special relationship with the United States. It was a means goal as well as an ends goal. To the Prime Minister and Mr. Healey this was one of the critical reasons for preserving the East of Suez role if it were at all possible.

Nevertheless the strategic relationship, including what Professor Coral Bell has called the advanced-weapons connexion, with the United States were not sufficiently strong to stop Labour withdrawing from East of Suez or to stand in the way of closer ties with Europe.[1] This was due to two factors. First, the United States, far from wanting Britain to remain aloof from the process of European integration, had constantly pushed her entry into the E.E.C. Second, United States influence over British foreign policy was diminishing, not least because the strategic relationship was less salient than before.[2]

In the late 1950s and 1960s European Governments, much to the chagrin of their respective chiefs of staff, generally tended to play-

[1] The Debatable Alliance, op. cit. Dr. Bell discusses the nature of the advanced weapons connexion which, when she wrote about it in 1962, had enormous importance for Britain in structuring her strategic interests.

[2] Collective Security, op. cit., p. 65.

down the strategic dimension; instead they devoted themselves to economic problems and political crises, perhaps out of a feeling of strategic impotence. The prevailing attitude was that there was no real hope that Europe could remove its humiliating strategic dependence upon the United States.[1] And this incontrovertible fact, it was feared, if pondered upon for too long might sap confidence and morale. The question of European security was fraught with such moral and intellectual complexity that it was thought more prudent to let it remain undisturbed. Moreover the détente encouraged European political elites to turn their minds away from intractable defence problems quite safely. This optimism did not persist into the seventies.

It was not only the diminishing prominence of the strategic connexion and the stoic acceptance of the strategic nuclear deadlock that weakened the strategic raison d'etre for the 'special relationship'. Gaullist strategic analysis and theory too had encouraged the notion that a close relationship with the United States did not necessarily guarantee that America would in all circumstances defend Europe, just as a weaker relationship did not necessarily preclude it.[2] Indeed, might not a closer relationship with the United States, so the argument ran, lead to all sorts of embarrassments and perhaps dangers which might be spared if the relationship were not quite so close? The Vietnam syndrome had become a part of the political consciousness of Europe's political elites. Fear of uncontrolled escalation arising from a limited conflict was beginning to diminish the attractiveness of the Atlantic Alliance.[3] The Left could agree with this analysis.

[1] This dependence was not merely political or economic but the result of military technology which rendered Europe horribly vulnerable to nuclear destruction in the event of deterrence failing. See Williams, Geoffrey, The Permanent Alliance: the European-American Alliance, op. cit., pp. 357-362.

[2] see Kohl, W. L. French Nuclear Diplomacy, 1971.

[3] The Permanent Alliance, op. cit.

It was this downgrading of the strategic and political links with the United States, combined with a political and economic shift away from the Commonwealth, which left the East of Suez role in such a vulnerable and exposed position. Nevertheless it is improbable that this movement would in itself have induced a withdrawal from East of Suez. More immediately decisive than the subtle change in Labour's perception of the traditional spheres of British strategic interests was the increasing gap between capability and commitment that made it inevitable that inexorably Labour would have to choose between those spheres of interest.

When the Labour Government assumed office it made no immediate attempt to limit the extent and nature of Britain's foreign policy. It is true that it strongly emphasized that Britain was over-committed, but it simply (and simplistically) argued that the answer to this problem lay in greater efficiency in defence matters and not in fewer commitments. Nevertheless, despite some modest successes in the area of cost-effectiveness, Labour lamentably failed to bridge the gap between capability and commitment. In fact the gulf became a chasm. Not only did Britain's commitments East of Suez become more onerous and ominous as Confrontation escalated to a level which stretched Britain to the point just short of what was endurable, but it also seemed possible that Britain would be expected to make a greater contribution to European defence.

Whereas Britain's commitment to Europe was relatively stable, since there was an irreducible minimum contribution below which a

British Government would not fall, the same could not and did not apply to East of Suez commitment. Indeed the overseas role was largely dependent on what happened in Europe and upon the logic of Britain's continental strategy. Britain's interests were so interrelated and her forces so stretched that the nation's defence policy could only operate on the assumption that commitments were activated only in an orderly and conventionally interspersed sequence, one by one in turn. It followed that the East of Suez role only appeared stable and permanent while the détente in Europe continued and while the demands of continental security remained low. Unfortunately, under Labour the demands of European security threatened to increase. There was growing uncertainty about the United States' contribution to the Continent, as well as deep foreboding about the dark shadow of the Russian naval build-up in the Mediterranean.[1]

And yet, while Britain's commitments became more active and burdensome, her capacity to fulfil them failed to materialize correspondingly. By the end of 1965 Britain's planned defence expenditure had been stripped to the bone, its overweight excesses trimmed in a flurry of cost-effective exercises. The 1966 Defence Review hardly improved matters. In fact, it did not do so. Indeed it "made a point of emphasising the over expansion of British forces but it did relatively little to relieve the situation".[2] The real tragedy for Labour was that each round of defence cuts demanded a reciprocal round of cuts in the nation's commitments, and each year's defence White Paper invariably appeared just short of the next economic crisis, which then foreshadowed

[1] Erickson, John, Soviet Defence Policies and Naval Interests, and Weinland, Robert, Analysis of Admiral Gorshkov's Navies in War and Peace, Chapters 4 and 29 respectively in McGuire, Booth, McDonnell, International Affairs, Vol. XLVII, No. 3, July, 1971.

[2] Martin, L. W., British Defence Policy: the Long Recessional. op. cit., p. 3.

more cuts in defence expenditure the following year. If a happy equipoise of circumstances were ever reached in this desperately downward spiral it was only short-lived: new economic situations invariably stimulated further rounds of action and reaction.

Labour's decision to withdraw from East of Suez - as with earlier decisions - was a classic example of the interrelationship between defence and foreign policy.[1] But they were not well co-ordinated and the Ministry of Defence and Foreign and Colonial Offices pursued different interpretations of the policy of withdrawal. And it became apparent that "the failure of the departments concerned to co-ordinate foreign and defence policies" in relation to decolonization led to "several independent and often contradictory lines of policy".[2] Nevertheless it is clear that both were inexorably moving after 1965 in the same grand direction and that both contributed to the erosion of the East of Suez role. They do not, however, contribute equally. It was the growing realisation by the Government that Britain could not sustain the broad range of foreign policy commitments that she had done in the past, rather than any fundamental assessment of where her interests lay, that really explains the withdrawal decision and the turn towards a regional and away from a universal defence policy. The Government's somewhat tentative bid to establish a general capability should not be allowed to obscure this trend: it was perhaps little more than the penultimate gesture of an imperial power anxious to both appease its conscience and meet the resentments of its ostensible allies.

1 Darby, Philip. op. cit. pp. 16-21.

2 See John Baylis, et. al., op. cit., p. 265.

It was clear also, that Britain's capability deficiency and the shift from an oceanic to a Eurocentric strategy were secular trends and not temporary aberrations. It was because the defence over-stretch was not a temporary phenomenon and because the prominence of Europe did not cease to be relevant because of the transitory Gaullist veto, that the East of Suez role was eventually terminated - the result of being constantly squeezed between twin pressures for a prolonged period of interaction.

Clearly, world events militated against the East of Suez role, but it would be imprudent to see the withdrawal decision entirely in terms of external environmental factors. After all events are a mixture of both the external and internal environments in international politics. What matters is how events are perceived by various actors, individual decision-makers, political parties, pressure groups, government departments and other centres of power, and what influence is then exerted upon the Government of the day.[1] Indeed the decision to withdraw from East of Suez was uniquely that taken by a particular Cabinet and would almost certainly not have been taken exactly when it was, had Britain not had a Labour Government. The timing of the decision was obviously affected by those multiplicity of internal pressures which are peculiar to Labour Cabinets divided between conflicting ideological commitments and expectations.

Whereas the Labour Party's almost total concern with domestic matters often leads in opposition to an apathetic attitude towards defence matters, when in power this same concern frequently stimulates an intense hostility to defence policy from the left of the Party

[1] See Vital, David. The Making of British Foreign Policy, for a general discussion of the factors affecting policy-makers.

who identify only friends on the left even when as organized state power those 'friends' have large military establishments. While an opposition is generally oblivious to the cost of implementing ambitious programmes of social change, and is more concerned with packaging its programme for a marked electoral effect, a Government's primary concern is to decide who gets what and when, that is, how scarce resources are to be allocated between different priorities. Political parties tend to face up to the fact that both defence and domestic objectives are irreconcilable claimants upon limited resources only when they have actually to initiate policy-decisions in power. This was made brutally apparent to the Labour Governments of 1964 and 1966 because they presided over a period of acute resource constraint and yet one of increasing social and economic demands. Labour was expected to convert increasingly heavy inputs into spectacularly successful outputs as rapidly as possible.[1]

That the Party had so many demands to make was inevitable given that Labour had been out of power for so long. It therefore came into office with extensive social commitments and a passionate desire to implement a programme of radical social change. Nor was it surprising that Party pressure on the Government's defence policy reached its peak when the Government's efforts to allocate scarce resources were at their most intense. Its wage freezes and incomes policies and its

[1] See The Go Ahead Year, 1966, which set the tone of Labour's heady optimism on the economy: "The aims are simple enough; we want full employment, a faster rate of industrial expansion; a sensible distribution of industry throughout the country; an end to the present chaos in traffic and transport; a brake on rising prices and a solution to our balance of payments problems". p.5. Also, Labour pledged itself to achieve: "... a national plan for Transport covering the national networks of road, rail and coach communication properly co-ordinated with air, coastal shipping and post services." p.77. Finally, it was claimed that "the nation needs and Labour will carry through a revolution in our educational system". p.99.

overall economic strategy of public expenditure cuts were the clearest indications to the Party that it faced a stark choice between social and defence priorities. This was not new nor unexpected but the agony of the choice to be made proved much more unpalatable than most Labour Ministers had expected.

In any choice between these priorities it is usual for a Labour Government to pursue its domestic goals and to disregard its defence ones: it would be altogether surprising for a Labour Government to forego its social priorities in order to maintain its defence policy. Of course its leaders are historically and ideologically susceptible to pressure favouring social welfare provision, educational expenditure, the maintenance of full employment and price stability. Moreover, in time of Party despondency, of the kind experienced after 1966, the fundamentalists, of both the utopian and marxist Left, usually reassert themselves and the demands for a return to a more ideologically 'socialist' orientated policy gather support.[1] Political principles are rediscovered and political expediency repudiated. The East of Suez role in fact had very little ideological justification or even legitimacy in the eyes of the Left, and it was this absence of doctrinal backing, combined with a perception that the role was not really central to the 'national interest' either, that exposed its vulnerability.[2]

And yet while a degree of hope persisted that the economy would pick up prior to 1966, the East of Suez presence remained a credible

[1] Stephen Hasler defines the Left as "moralistic, idealistic, utopian, civil libertarian at home and internationalist abroad", op. cit., p.117.

[2] But the Left has always exaggerated the exact importance of Britain to the Third World. This attitude Denis Healey once described as the 'tea planters of Assam' complex. Mr. Kingsley Martin when editor of The New Statesman and Nation revealed that this complex had also become a fixation.

policy. It was not thought to be as doctrinally devoid of morality or as imprudent as the Vietnam or Rhodesian policies and the fundamentalists with growing vehemence therefore concentrated on the latter. It was only when a shortage of resources to sustain comprehensive commitments really became apparent that the Party's attention turned upon the East of Suez role.[1] In the first instance, then, the role came under acute intra-party pressure simply because it was absorbing a significant part of the nation's resources which it was considered could be diverted into social and economic programmes. The Party's barely conceivable yet almost total consensus over defence policy could not be sustained under the crucible of economic stringency. It was only at that nodal point that the East of Suez role's shallow ideological appeal became desperately obvious.

The East of Suez role therefore had three basic weaknesses which in the cold atmosphere of bleak austerity made it an obvious candidate for a Labour Government's axe: it was only a peripheral 'national interest', it was consuming scarce resources and its ideological justification carried only a scintilla of conviction with either wing of the Labour Party.

It is now possible, without considering further the substance of the withdrawal decision, to evaluate the procedures and processes involved. While any final judgement inevitably must be critical if not overwhelmingly so, it will not be entirely hostile, Mr. Healey as the Minister responsible for the military substance of the East of Suez role, at any rate can be partially excused since his defence policy was effectively circumscribed

[1] As Mr. Mayhew remarked in his resignation speech of 1966 that "if the Government insists on a world role for Britain in the 70s it must be prepared to pay the price, and provide a balanced force East of Suez, including F111A and carriers". Extract in Survival, Vol. VIII, No. 4, April 1966.

by the Treasury as well as the Foreign Office and above all by the Cabinet. It was inevitable that the 'financial restraint' was never far from the Defence Minister's mind, and from that indeed of the Cabinet as a whole. It certainly made his task a great deal more difficult. "The Treasury were satisfied with £2,000 million and I had no incentive to push further", said Mr. Healey. "It was really arbitrary. We were obsessed by the fact that there was this automatic increase in defence costs if one didn't do something. We were faced with a programme which went up from £2,000 million to £2,400 million in five years, so we decided that we would make sure that in five years' time we didn't go up at all." And then came the crucial observation that "the Treasury had totally miscalculated its ability to run the economy".[1] The Cabinet also seriously miscalculated its capacity to meet its political commitments with diminishing economic resources.

Denis Healey then, was not entirely to blame for the failures of his defence policy. He was under extreme pressure from the Treasury's defence ceiling, from the foreign office's plantigrade reluctance to cut commitment and from the Government's own anguished failure to achieve economic growth. Then there was the influence of the Prime Minister who favoured a grand strategy with imperial overtones.

Mr. Healey was not alone in the difficulties he faced. His inherited responsibilities and commitments were compounded by Labour's vastly ambitious defence strategy. The Government as a whole was also set some fairly intractable defence problems, particularly in relation to the East of Suez role. Chronic economic weakness, a Service manpower shortage, the costs and risks of Confrontation, escalating defence costs

[1] The Policies of Power, op. cit., p. 187.

and greater military capabilities available to actual and potential adversaries, all in some significant way obstructed the formulation of a strong and consistent defence policy. So did the attitude of much of the Labour Party; the Party Conference in particular. The trade unions also strongly influenced the Labour Party Conference, and through the Conference, the National Executive Committee. Of course the NEC tends to take a different view of defence policy from that of the government. The trade unions, despite the challenge of Frank Cousins over the nuclear question in 1960, have though generally endeavoured to support the Cabinet over its defence policy. As the right controlled the bloc votes they carried the day at Labour Party Conferences.[1] The growing influence of the left within the trade unions began to complicate the Cabinet's priorities though by 1967, and beyond, but the influence of the trade unions should not be underestimated. Of the twenty-eight members of the NEC, only ten are not directly or indirectly elected, by the bloc vote of the trade unions. And it was clear that trade union opposition was the principal reason for the Wilson Government's abandonment of the Prices and Incomes Policy in 1969-70. The growing left-wing influence within the trade unions and the increase in what John MacKintosh described as the populist-socialist influence contributed to the marked opposition to the Government's defence and foreign policies.[2]

[1] The trade union 'bloc vote' elects the twelve members of the trade union section of the NEC; it also effectively determines who is elected as the five members of the 'women's section', and the Party Treasurer.

[2] The populist/socialist approach is strictly speaking a post-1970 development. Professor MacKintosh is surely right in asserting that the populist/socialist approach is not a genuine doctrinaire position but one which raises not questions of principle rather than those relating to who is making the demand? As MacKintosh contended this populist approach consisted of lending support "to the best organized and most defiant groups, presumably because they are showing most working-class vigour". See Problems of the Labour Party, The Political Quarterly, Oct./Dec. 1972.

Indeed, frequent attempts at a well-informed and dispassionate discussion of defence policy therefore simply collapsed into a heated exchange of well-rehearsed argument, which established the continued existence of deep differences of opinion. The indifference of the Party to defence matters, additionally the belief that defence goals were of less importance than social priorities, did not make the Government's policy-making very easy. The non-doctrinal centre of the Party rallied to the Government's aid. They regarded the defence policy of the Cabinet as quite appropriate for an essentially non-theoretical Gaitskellite revisionist Party.

Above all there was the chaotic and wayward nature of events East of Suez, and the fact that all projections about what might happen if Britain withdrew from the area were impossible to evaluate since they could plausibly prove true or false according to the variables which any particular scenario might include. There was acute and not unexpected doubt about the lessons that could be derived from past and present military interventions overseas.[1] The lesson of the American intervention in Vietnam seemed very different from the lesson of the British involvement in Confrontation (or indeed of that in Malaya between 1948-60) and the East African deployments of limited force.[2]

It was also a complication that as harassed Ministers grappled with the East of Suez decision, they must have found it very difficult to evaluate all those pressures exerted upon them, because the World Role was devoid of real substance. There was no dogma to encapsulate

[1] This point was made by Mayhew in his resignation speech. He said:"It has been suggested that in the seventies we would avoid getting involved alone with any country possessing sophisticated weapons, but this concept of sophistication is dangerously vague. The Vietcong do not have 'sophisticated weapons' yet they tie down very large United States forces. Moreover, it took Indonesia only five years to acquire these weapons, and other countries may quickly follow suit." Survival, op. cit., p. 127.

[2] Thompson, Robert, Defeating Communist Insurgency.

the debate and there were no clear core interests to dictate where Britain's 'national interest' lay. Had the relevance and indeed the significance of the East of Suez role as an imperial responsibility actually disappeared? Was the role no longer an essential element in the containment of so-called global Communism? Did the increasing interdependence and interpenetration of nation-states erode the relevance of military force? These questions were so complex and bewildering because there existed a moral, an intellectual, and sentimental aroma about the role which inevitably led to ambivalence and confusion.

Matters were worse confounded for the Government by it so obviously being at the mercy of totally unpredictable events. It is however a demonstrable fact that middle ranking powers, are unable to control their environment to any great extent and are to some extent circumscribed by any minor mutation in their surroundings. Thus even a minor change in the external environment can compel an extensive re-alignment of policy. It is this which explicates the inconstancy of policy often imposed on states which are rapidly declining in power. "If I were to identify", Mr. Healey said, "one single lesson which a minister must learn when he is in office, it is the way in which financial constraints must limit a Government's freedom of choice - even in the richest country in the world".[1] How much bigger a constraint it must be for the Government of a second-rate power, although of "the first rank" which embraces world wide commitments.[2]

[1] Royal United Services Institute Lecture, 22nd October, 1964.

[2] The phrase "of the first rank" is a splendid invention of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

Nevertheless, despite the complexitites and uncertainties faced by the Labour Government, it did not take the East of Suez decision lightly, and for a considerable time struggled heroically, if mistakenly, to maintain a position which it thought contributed to international stability, even in the face of mounting opposition. Indeed, the East of Suez role was not universally admired in the country and even less than respected by an increasingly politicized Trade Union movement and in much of the P.L.P.[1] In standing up to this veritable chorus of opposition, in disregarding the insular pre-disposition of the Labour Party, and by refusing to contemplate a precipitous wind-up of the World Role, the Government revealed a degree of obduracy and resilience if not courage which is to be admired or condemned according to political commitment.

However, Labour had to formulate its defence policy against a sombre background and perhaps as a consequence made several fundamental errors in judgement and revealed some glaring analytical weaknesses. The superficial verdict could be the usual one of 'too little and too late'. But the Cabinet's rejoinder to its critics was that Britain's defence policy reached "the right place at the right time", and that this is all anyone can ask of a Government. But even with the contention that Britain had reached "the right place at the right time" the Government could still be condemned because it did not get there in the 'right way'. Richard Crossman saw it rather in that way.

Patrick Gordon Walker described an alarming process of trial and

[1] The Opposition to In Place of Strife which emerged in 1969 in a belated bid to control prices and incomes through statutory means ran into considerable trade union opposition. This played some part in radicalizing the Trade Union leadership at both plant and national level. See Jenkins, Peter, The Battle of Downing Street.

error and seemed in no doubt about the unplanned nature of the withdrawal decisions. "Faltering enough they seem",[1] he said. "The decision appears so reluctant as to have been unintended until almost the last moment. The Cabinet looks as if it were pushed and coerced by unforeseen events into an unwelcome conclusion. Factors and policies that were clearly linked were not correlated". Later on he talked about the "... dilatory progress towards the great decision...."[2]. This impression of decision-making is also confirmed by Crossman and Brown; indeed by Wilson himself.

Labour followed an unpremeditated, erratic and involved course and therefore the Government was unable to take the long view. Policy simply lacked long-term stability. It was clear that policy-making appeared to be somewhat involuntary and often appeared to be an ill-considered response to yet another crisis. Labour's policy was in fact a mixture of rational and calculated primary decisions which then provoked a series of unplanned and unforeseeable secondary decisions. The Government was involved in an action and reaction phenomenon, a capability-commitment syndrome, induced by the nation's economic plight. Labour came into power strongly committed to reinforce the traditional features of British foreign policy: in the end it weakened them. This outcome was described as an "act of realism".[3]

At best Labour's defence policy was based on a painful realism, and at worst on self-laceration. Labour displayed a curious

[1] Gordon Walker, P., op. cit., p. 131.

[2] ibid.

[3] This phrase crept into Denis Healey's robust defence of his Defence Review of February 1966. In March he described his policy as "an exercise in political and military realism".

combination of romanticism, sentimentalism and escapism as it shifted from one policy stance to another. The Government at first clung doggedly to the full range of the nation's commitments and then refused to augment Britain's capabilities to meet its obligations. In the end it showed itself more willing to take risks East of Suez than to strain Party unity or to jeopardise its chances of eventual electoral success. Mr. Wilson's priorities carried the day.

Of course, it has been asserted that it would have been absurd for the Government to have flouted the views of the anti-East of Suez group while simultaneously reinstating prescription charges. It was inevitable that the Government not only acceded to pressures it sympathized with, but also came to terms with views which it knew to be inconsistent or even ill-founded. And yet while a Government should be responsible to articulated interests, it must not deny responsibility for the ultimate decision. This is, of course, an accepted and traditional distinction, but was the Labour Government guilty of fudging important decisions until and unless they were forced upon it by events or organized interests or both?

Above all the Labour leadership, while in opposition, had imposed a formidable straightjacket on themselves and within which they entombed their ill-fated defence policy. Its much vaunted defence review was primarily designed not to reveal where Britain's interests lay and how best to defend them, but instead how best to save money. In consequence Labour's defence policy became wracked with self-imposed contradictions. The Government was no longer the master of the nation's strategic interests. It gave the erroneous impression that a defence

policy which was economically constricted was necessarily also strategically and politically relevant. Its defence doctrine had been undermined by economic exigency and it was now the saliency of issues rather than their intrinsic importance which obsessed it.

Perhaps this was inevitable, given that Labour adopted an attitude to policy making where the hope was to keep options open to delay making policy choices and to adopt a permissive attitude towards the decisions themselves. This Wilsonian approach to policy formulation was based upon the Prime Minister's own logic that to choose certain policy options means to foreclose others. To him it was a sum-zero game. While an approach which permits 'decisions to make themselves' may be in keeping with Lord Salisbury's famous dictum, it is appropriate only for a powerful country which can significantly control its external environment. Moreover such a doctrine requires sufficient capability to limit the damage resulting from the pursuit of perhaps superfluous or obsolete interests. As Britain discovered, the honouring of out-dated commitments put an intolerable strain on its economy. That Labour adopted this permissive if not actually passive approach to foreign policy making can be attributed to it neither having a coherent set of socialist values[1] which could help shape its foreign policy nor a clear grasp of Britain's 'national interest'.

It followed, that when the Labour Government was faced with the need to make a choice in 1968 it did so not by the process of lengthy deliberation or analysis as to where Britain's interests lay, but through an unedifying process of drift. Above all, though, it was a style of policy making which generated great diplomatic consternation.

[1] Labour's actual ideology, that is, what I have called Labourism, a synthesis of working-class politics and middle-class revisionist doctrine, lacks a basic coherence because it attempts to reconcile 'national interests' - whatever they might be - with 'international interests' which can never be properly perceived.

Britain projected the image of a volatile, inconsistent, uncertain and dilatory ally. She acted in indecent haste and for mediocre reasons. She demonstrably revealed herself as a nation with world wide commitments she could not afford and still less sustain and European aspirations she could not yet define and still less achieve. Britain's indignity and not to say impotence, appeared complete.

In October 1964 the top priority of the Wilson Government was to save money on defence. With the economic situation that then existed, and the cost in foreign exchange resulting from Britain's global role, this was sensible.

When Healey began his major Defence Review however, the first question posed was - 'What is the best policy we can get for less money?', rather than the more fundamental 'What must we spend?' This emphasis on economy and efficiency, reflecting the mood of the nation and of the politicians, preoccupied defence planners throughout the period of the Labour Government.[1] It was an emphasis on means and not ends.

Defence expenditure could have been reduced once Britain's role for the seventies had been decided. If the answer to 'What sort of defence policy do we want?' had been - 'A European-orientated one', then Britain could have had both a coherent policy to match her foreign policy, and a policy she could have afforded. But the formulation of policy became more difficult when expenditure was arbitrarily fixed before a serious review of commitments and capabilities had taken place.

The policy set out in the 1966 Defence Review could, however, have been afforded if the Government had succeeded in running the economy.

1 See Greenwood, David. "The 1974 Defence Review in Perspective". Survival, Vol. XVII, Number 5, Sept./Oct. 1975 for a comparison between the 1974 revision of the planned defence effort and that of 1966.

The Prime Minister's decision not to devalue in 1964-5, and the collapse of the National Plan, however, sealed the fate of the Government and of its attempts to stay East of Suez.

Had an attempt been made to cost defence requirements rather than what defence would be allowed from the Treasury, Britain could have had a coherent policy, and money saved for social services.

The important question on which the Defence Review should have been centred, was how much was required to pay for an adequate policy based on a balanced assessment of 'national interests' and commitments. Perceived interests must shape commitments, not the other way round. A policy more in line with British interests was achieved - by a process of trial and error - but not through a process of relating ends to means. Therefore little credit can be given to the Cabinet for successfully perceiving what it felt to be in the 'national interest'.

In 1966, following the publication of the Review, Britain gave the uncomfortable impression of being a country with a global role forced on her by commitments that were a legacy of her history and tradition. De Gaulle had, for example, known when to cut his losses. He ended the economically exhausting war in Algeria and then increased the pride of the French by reaching a position of strength following a less ambitious policy. Britain however failed to reorder her external commitments.

The key factor in politics is the timing of a decision; in defence that means knowing when to withdraw. The Labour Government seemed to lack the necessary political judgement. They did not show they had mastered 'the art of the possible'.

If Britain's defence policy was to match her interests there should have been a rigorous examination to find out what they were in

the late sixties, and what they were expected to be in the seventies and eighties. It never took place.

The Review had all the signs of excessive British pragmatism - that preoccupation with 'means' rather than 'ends'. It was no doubt inevitable with the Foreign Office in a state of intellectual paralysis.

Clearly the Foreign Office was largely to blame for the banal nature of the Defence Review, because it refused to establish a more realistic foreign policy, or even to examine it thoroughly. This alone could keep defence policy its faithful servant.

But the Cabinet compounded the mistakes of the Foreign Office by pretending that economic facts alone should determine policy. The main error of Harold Wilson's Government was the prior and absolute commitment to unrealistic goals, which became more and more unrealistic as attempts to manage the economy collapsed. Politicians are by nature optimistic. Wilson's Government, however, attempted too much with too little, and failed to find the extra resources needed.

It is difficult to alter policies moulded by hundreds of years of tradition and history, but the Foreign Office had failed to consider Britain's declining economic position. It would have been irresponsible to drop everything outside Europe - like Confrontation - immediately, but the consequences of having to adjust to crisis changes as events got beyond control were worse than the possible effects of a more considered and planned withdrawal. If the job of politicians is to decide between alternative values and policies, and to decide when to do what, then the Wilson Cabinet must be criticized for its inept performance during the first three years of office.

In the crisis following devaluation the Defence Minister was told to cut all existing commitments except the 'irreducible' commitment to NATO Europe.

This policy was chosen by men in a difficult position, faced by the problem of how best to salvage what they could, and, of course, to remain in power. The Cabinet must keep its non-defence cohorts sufficiently loyal. Their mismanagement of the economy had left them weak, and it was the moment when the left wing of the Labour Party had most influence in affecting defence affairs.

But the real question was still avoided. What were the irreducible limits of military effort required to uphold the nation's interest? Merely to reduce defence expenditure avoided this. Saving money on defence is a virtue only if the essential job can still be done. Yet it must be admitted that substantial savings were achieved, and defence resources were often more efficiently used. Under a weaker Government the cuts would have been even greater.

With benefit of hindsight it is possible to claim that if the Government had devalued sooner - for example, in 1964 or 1965 - then the periodic defence cuts would have been less severe. And if substantial reductions had occurred in Britain's defence commitments and capabilities in 1966 devaluation might perhaps have been averted, or postponed to a time chosen to suit the Government and the interests of the nation.

Britain's efforts East of Suez were at last reluctantly abandoned by the Labour Government in February 1968. As from 1971 Britain said

she would have no further strategic interest in the area east of the Persian Gulf.

The claim advanced in the Review of 1966 and the White Paper of July 1967 that Britain could make an indispensable contribution to peace and stability East of Suez ended when the Government found that the price was too high. Britain had made some contribution to stability by her modest military presence,[1] but that was altering as growing nationalism and the changing pattern of economic and commercial affairs made this of declining value. The policy cost more, and achieved less. For the British at least, it no longer seemed worth the money.

Britain should have announced her decision to withdraw when Confrontation ended. Aden, together with the Gulf and the Far East, should have been abandoned in 1966, with total withdrawal by 1970 or 1971. This would have given the Gulf and Asian Commonwealth rulers one or two years more in which to cope with the consequences of withdrawal.

Nevertheless, whatever may be said about the way in which the withdrawal decision was made, nobody could deny its importance. It was not only a dramatic departure from the norms of Britain's foreign policy but it also held out Himalayan implications for other nations also. It symbolized not only an admission that Britain's power position had declined, but also a belated acceptance that the Commonwealth and the Special Relationship with America were no longer what they once had been.

The historical significance of the decision was all the greater for it marked the culminating point of over a hundred years of change:

[1] See Annex d.

it was to all intents and purposes an irrevocable decision taken belatedly in the fullness of time. The decision owed nothing to the ideology of socialism as such but was clearly shaped by Labour's social democratic revisionist doctrine which gave expression to the values of a pluralist liberal-democratic ideology. The ideology of socialism was demonstrated to be functional to Labour in opposition but virtually if not totally irrelevant to Labour once in power. The imperial role was not at first rejected by the utopian and marxist left of the Party because it identified in the Commonwealth the basis of a possible neutralist foreign policy for Britain. When that proved a chimera the left repudiated the imperial role. The revisionist right and the Labourist centre regarded the East of Suez role as the basis of Britain's pretence to remain a great power. When that proved also a chimera the right repudiated the imperial role. This explains why the Labour leadership could embrace the imperial role with considerable enthusiasm and abandon it with alacrity when circumstances forced them to do so. Cultural Labourism and democratic socialist revisionism within the Labour Party became the dominant ideology of the Labour government but was not an ideology which encouraged a consistent attitude towards international politics. The myth that a Labour government meant a commitment to a socialist foreign policy - which can never be defined - even in principle, was however effectively destroyed. Labour in office indeed differed only from the Conservatives in the slight emphasis it occasionally gave to pursuing national policies which in the long-run - and perhaps therefore never - might assist in the re-structuring of the international system.

Labour simply aspired to play a part in creating an international society of states whose 'interaction' and 'interdependence' could assure world peace.[1] Such a society is, however, an anarchical international society in present circumstances, because no real element of government - a central agency - exists. Labour appears to articulate a somewhat weak Kantian or Grotian belief that expresses what Bull calls "the element of trans-national solidarity .... and the element of co-operation and regulated intercourse among states".[2] This would have appealed to Richard Cobden and John Bright right through to Arthur Henderson, George Landsbury and even Ernest Bevin and George Brown. All would have wished to strengthen the element of society in international politics and weaken Hobbesian elements. Of course most Conservative leaders would have shared much the same hope, but with a greater expectation that the Hobbesian element would always predominate in an international society.

[1] See Bull, Hedley, Anarchical Society, op. cit., p. 24. Professor Bull says that "a society of states (or international society) exists when a group of states, conscious of certain common interests and common values, form a society in the sense that they conceive themselves to be bound by a common set of rules in their relations with one another and share in the working of common institutions".

[2] ibid., p. 41.

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A

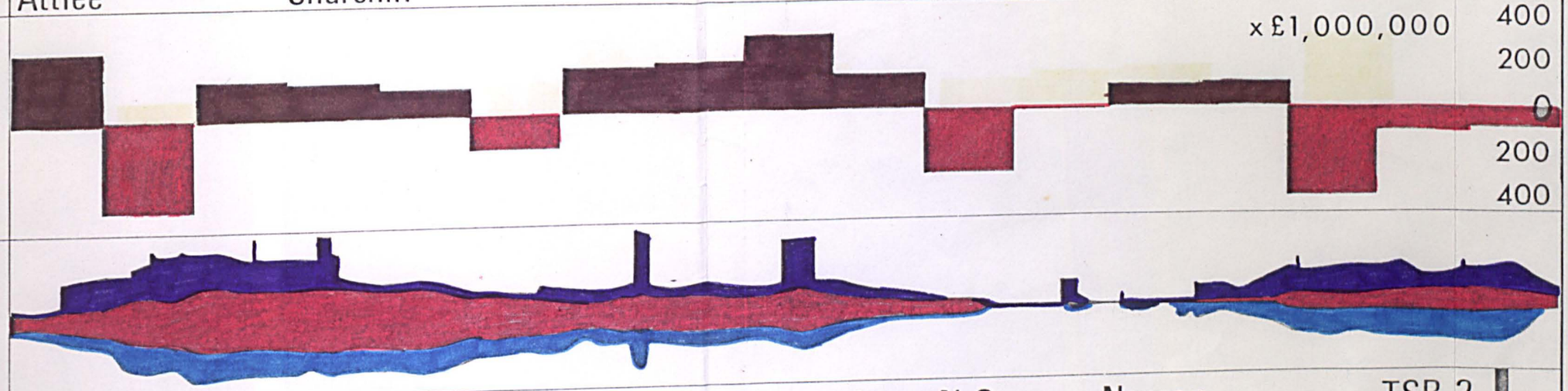
U.K. EMERGENCY OPERATIONS 1950–1966

Theatre	1950	1951	1952	1953	1954	1955	1956	1957	1958	1959	1960	1961	1962	1963	1964	1965	1966
Near East	Canal Zone						Suez	Cyprus (EOKA)								Cyprus (UN)	
Middle East	Abadan						Bahrein	Persian Gulf Patrol	Jordan		Muscat Oman		Kuwait			Aden	
Far East	Korea (UN)					Malaya									Indonesian Confrontation: W. Malaysian Patrol; Borneo; Strike Force		
Africa	Eritrea										Kenya	Congo (UN)		E. African Mutinies			Beira Patrol
Caribbean													British Guiana; Cuba I		Bahamas Patrol		
Other Operations: Mil	2	1	1	4	3	–	1	1	3	3	4	2	7	4	2	3	3	44
Other Operations: Civ	–	1	–	3	1	–	–	1	–	1	4	2	–	1	–	3	2	19
	1950	1951	1952	1953	1954	1955	1956	1957	1958	1959	1960	1961	1962	1963	1964	1965	1966	TOTALS

B

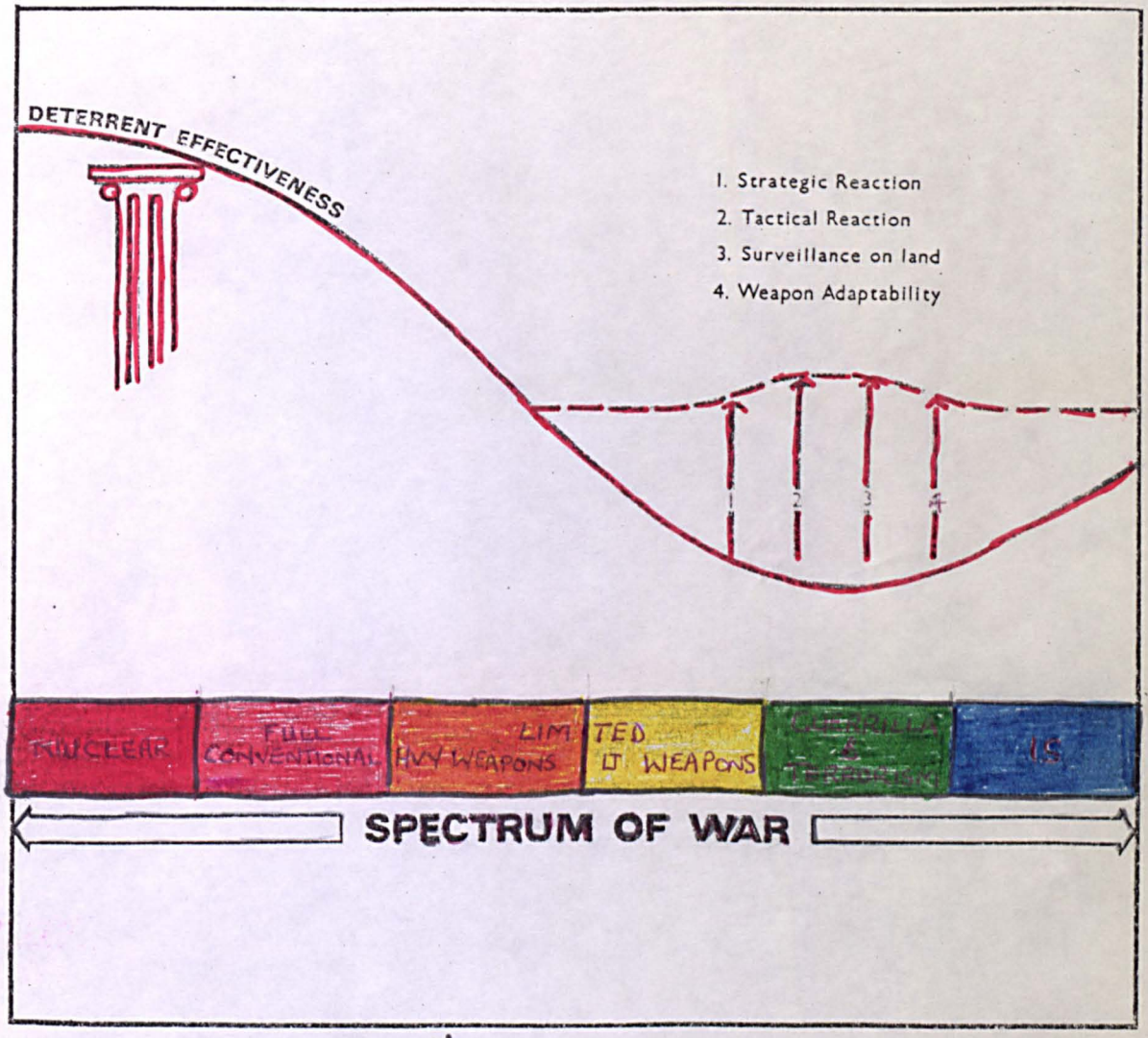
CORRELATION OF EVENTS 1950 – 1966

	1950	1951	1952	1953	1954	1955	1956	1957	1958	1959	1960	1961	1962	1963	1964	1965	1966
Events	Korea	NATO formed	SEATO formed	Suez	De Gaulle President	Wind of Change Speech	Cuba	Fall of Kruschev	Red Guards								
		Schumann Plan	Stalin dies	Baghdad Pact	Treaty of Rome	CENTO formed	Berlin Wall	Kennedy assassinated	UDI								
Political UK Governments	First and Second Attlee	Last Churchill		Eden	First Macmillan		Second Macmillan		Home	First and Second Wilson							
UK Balance of Payments Current Account																	

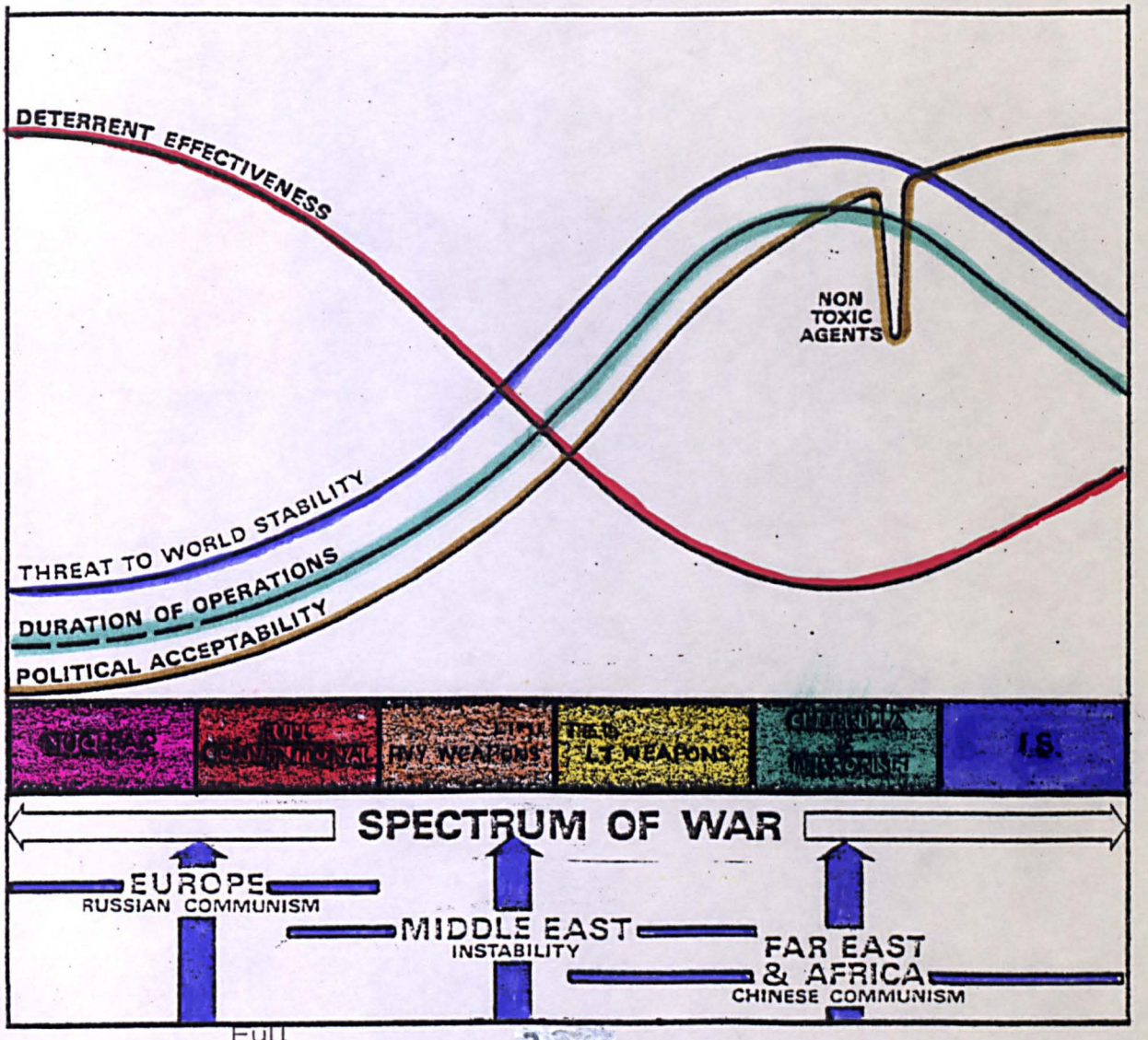


Major Emergency Operations																	
Major Events in British Defence Policy	N S to two years	Korean rearmament	Home Guard reformed	Defence cut–back	V-Force expansion		Sandys deterrence policy				Last N S call up		Nassau (Polaris)		TSR 2 stopped	Carrier decision	
Other Military Events	Indo China							Algeria				Congo	Viet Nam				
	Tibet						Hungary				China-India	Cuba			Dominican Republic	Indo-Pakistan	
Nuclear Weapons	UK		USA	USSR				UK			France				China		
	1950	1951	1952	1953	1954	1955	1956	1957	1958	1959	1960	1961	1962	1963	1964	1965	1966

C


DETERRENT EFFECTIVENESS
1. Strategic Reaction
2. Tactical Reaction
3. Surveillance on land
4. Weapon Adaptability
1
2
3
4
NUCLEAR
FULL CONVENTIONAL
LIM HVY WEAPONS
TED LT WEAPONS
GUERRILLA & TERRORISM
US
SPECTRUM OF WAR

1.



Nuclear | Full Conventional | Hvy Weapons | Limited | Lt Weapons | Guerrilla & Terrorism | I S

UK EMERGENCY OPERATIONS 1950-1966
EMPLOYMENT BY ARMS

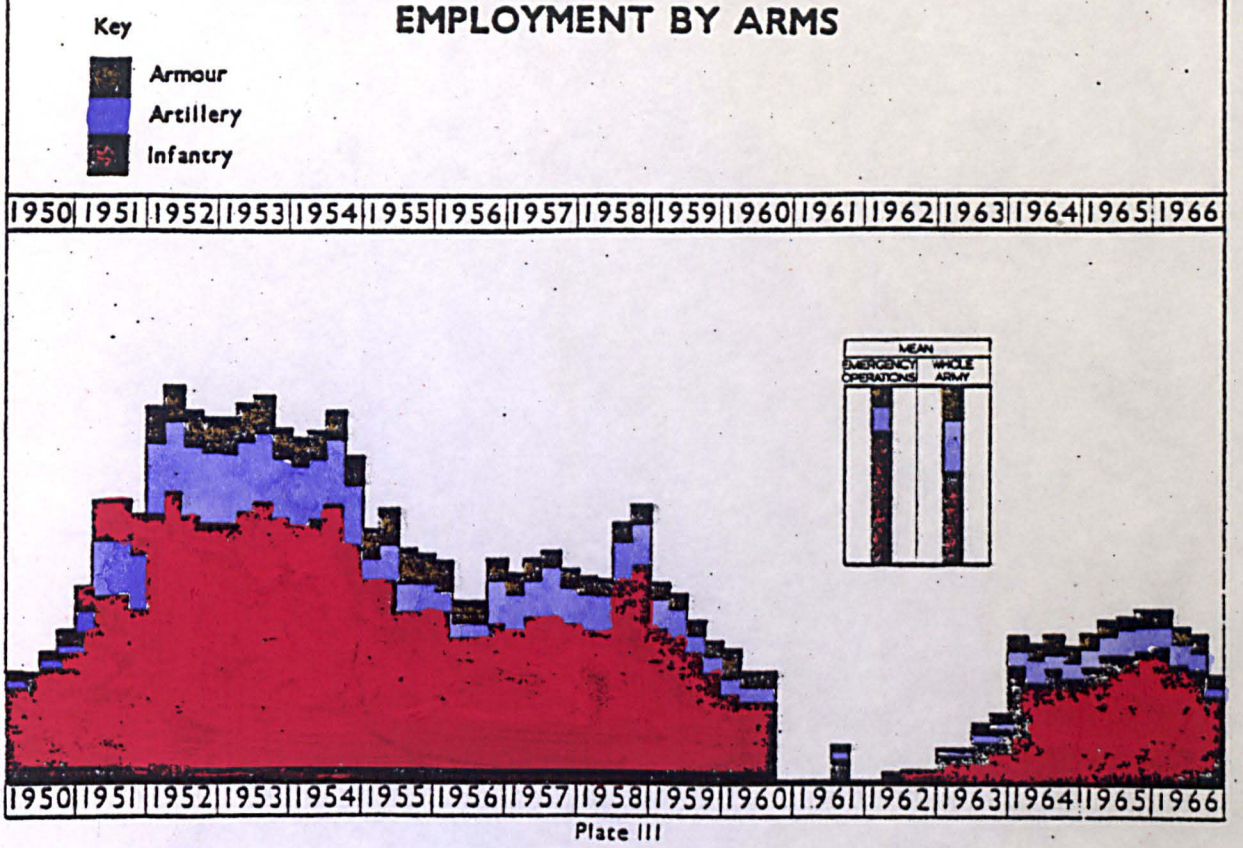


Plate III

UK EMERGENCY OPERATIONS 1956-1966
NAVAL EMPLOYMENT BY TASKS
(11 Years Only)

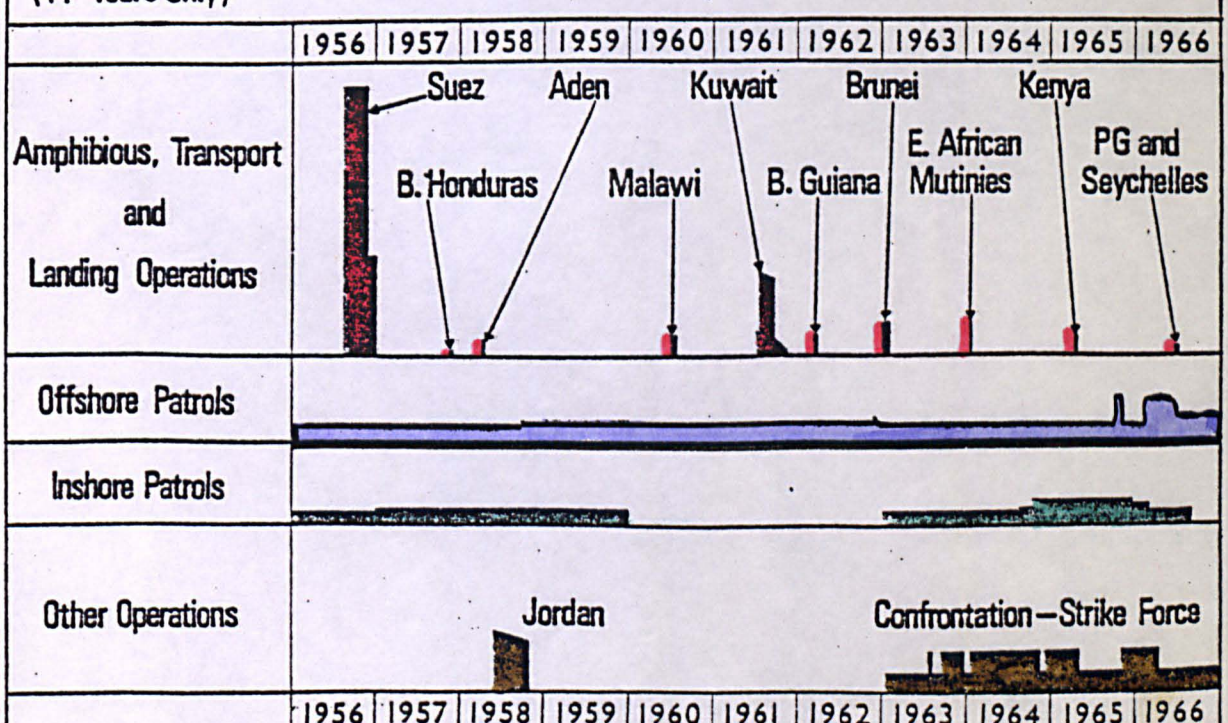


Plate IV

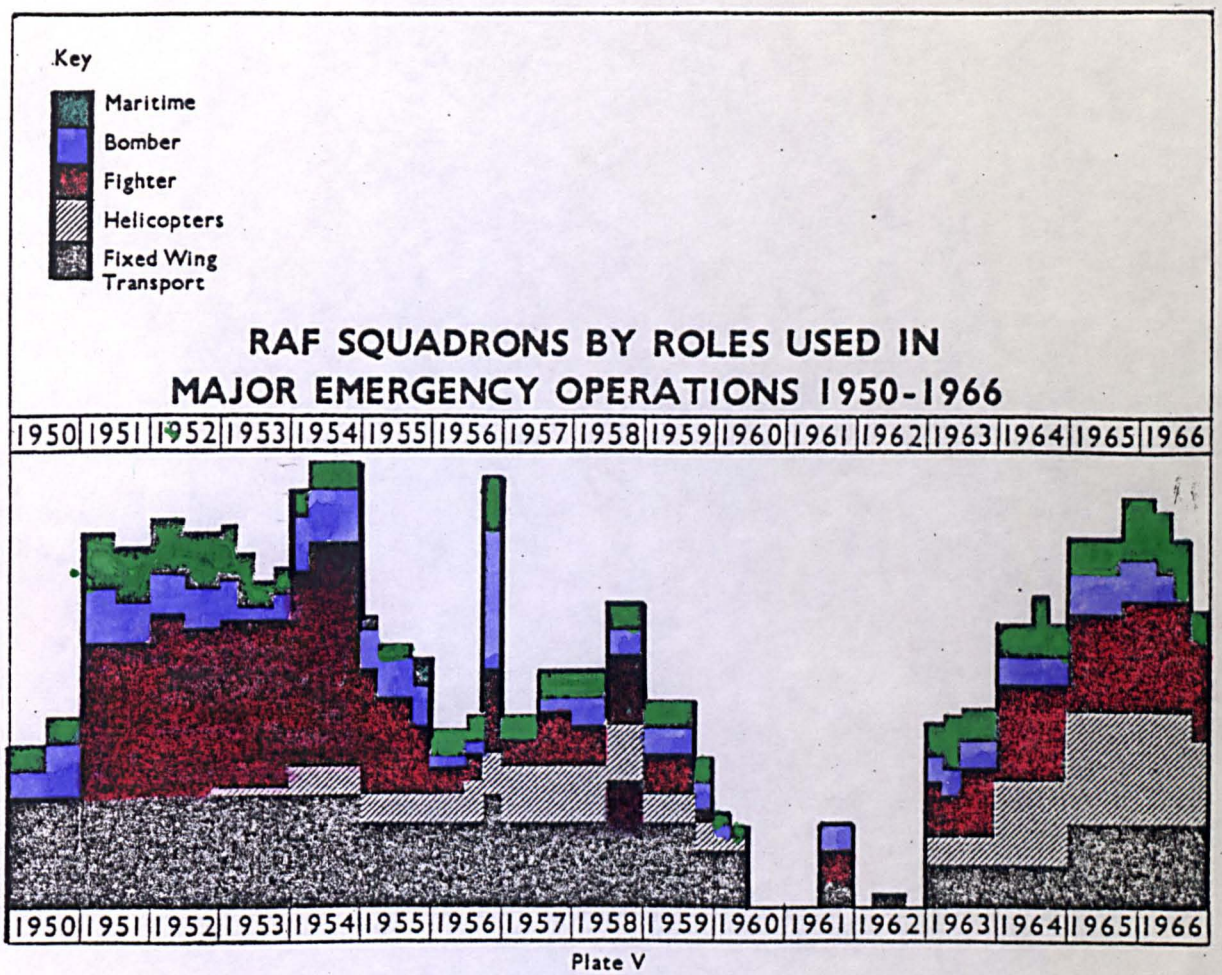

Key
Maritime
Bomber
Fighter
Helicopters
Fixed Wing Transport
RAF SQUADRONS BY ROLES USED IN MAJOR EMERGENCY OPERATIONS 1950-1966
1950 1951 1952 1953 1954 1955 1956 1957 1958 1959 1960 1961 1962 1963 1964 1965 1966
1950 1951 1952 1953 1954 1955 1956 1957 1958 1959 1960 1961 1962 1963 1964 1965 1966

Plate V

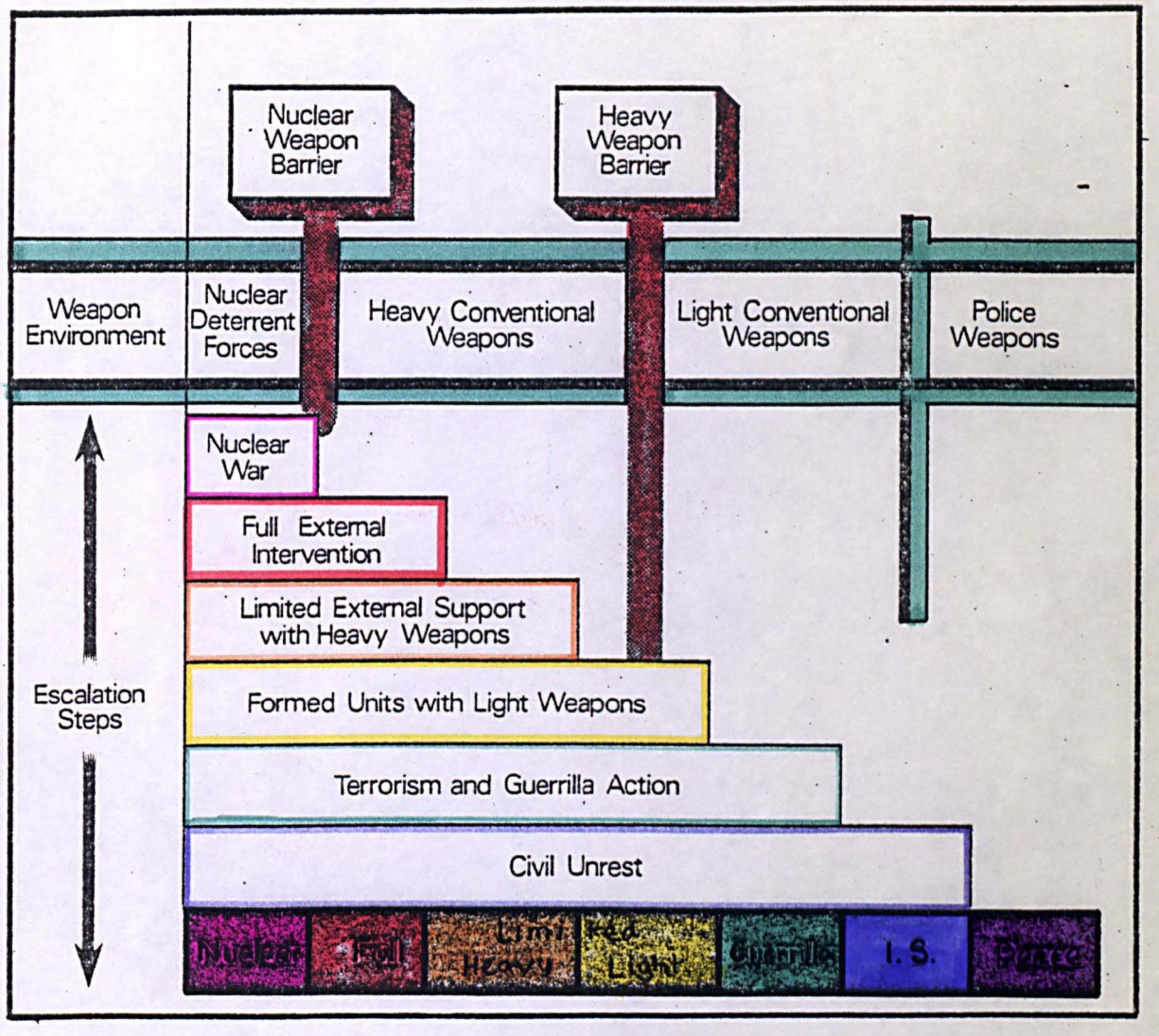

Nuclear Weapon Barrier
Heavy Weapon Barrier
Weapon Environment
Nuclear Deterrent Forces
Heavy Conventional Weapons
Light Conventional Weapons
Police Weapons
Nuclear War
Full External Intervention
Limited External Support with Heavy Weapons
Formed Units with Light Weapons
Terrorism and Guerrilla Action
Civil Unrest
Escalation Steps
Nuclear
Full
Ltd Heavy
Fed Light
Guerrilla
I. S.
Police

Plate VI

D

Date	*Operation*	*Service*
1948–60	**Malaya**	**RN, Army, RAF**
1949–52	**Eritrea: UN plebiscite**	**RN, Army, RAF**
1950–66	**Persian Gulf: Patrol**	**RN**
1950	Dar-Es-Salaam: Civil unrest	RN
1950–53	**Korea**	**RN, Army, RAF**
1950	Singapore: Hartog riots	Army
1951	Grenada: Civil unrest	RN
1951–56	**Canal Zone**	**RN, Army, RAF**
1951	**Abadan: Oil crisis**	**RN, Army, RAF**
1951	Jamaica: Hurricane	RN, Army
1952	Antarctica: Argentinian threat—Hope Bay	RN
1952–56	**Kenya**	**RN, Army, RAF**
1953	Antarctica: Argentinian threat—Deception Island	RN,
1953	United Kingdom: East Coast floods	RN, Army, RAF
1953–55	Persian Gulf: Buraimi dispute	RN, Army, RAF
1953	Ionian Islands: Earthquake	RN, Army, RAF
1953	Cyprus: Earthquake	RN, Army, RAF
1953	British Guiana: Constitutional crisis	RN, Army
1953	Trieste: Civil unrest	RN
1954	Grenada: Civil unrest	RN
1954	Sudan: Internal unrest	RAF
1954–59	**Cyprus: Eoka**	**RN, Army, RAF**
1954	Indo-China: Refugees from Hai-Phong	RN
1954	Haiti: Hurricane	RN
1956	Iraq: Supplies to Baghdad	RAF
1956	Hong Kong: Riots	Army
1956	**Bahrein: Civil unrest**	**RN, Army, RAF**
1956	**Suez**	**RN, Army, RAF**
1957–59	**Muscat and Oman**	**Army, RAF**
1957–66	**Aden and Southern Arabia: Egyptian subversion**	**RN, Army, RAF**
1957	Turkey: Earthquake	RN
1957	British Honduras: Civil unrest	RN, Army
1958	Bahamas: General strike	RN, Army
1958	British North Borneo: Indonesian threat to trade	RN
1958	**Jordan and Lebanon**	**RN, Army, RAF**
1958–63	Iceland: Patrol	RN
1959	Grenada: Civil unrest	RN
1959	British Honduras: Threat from Guatemala	RAF
1959–60	Gan: Civil unrest	RN, Army, RAF
1959	Grenada: Civil unrest	RN
1959	Libya: Floods	RN
1960	Mauritius: Cyclone	RN
1960	Uganda: Tribal terrorism	RAF
1960–61	Cameroons: Maintenance of stability	Army, RAF
1960	Hong Kong: Typhoon	Army
1960	Jamaica: Rastafarian insurrection	RN, Army
1960–61	**Congo**	**RAF**

E

Date	*Operation*	*Service*
1960	Virgin and Leeward Islands: Hurricane	RN
1960	Laos: Internal unrest	RAF
1960	Kenya: Floods	Army
1961	Bahamas: Cuban counter-revolutionaries	RN
1961	**Kuwait**	**RN, Army, RAF**
1961	Zanzibar: Maintenance of stability	Army, RAF
1961	British Honduras: Hurricane	RN, Army
1961	Kenya: Floods	RN
1962	British Honduras: Guatemalan threat	Army, RAF
1962–66	**British Guiana: Riots**	**RN, Army, RAF**
1962	Hong Kong: Refugee problem	Army
1962	Gan: Political unrest	RN, RAF
1962	Thailand: Threat from Laos	RAF
1962	East Malaysia: Anti-piracy patrols	RN, RAF
1962	India: Chinese invasion	RAF
1962	**Cuba**	**RAF**
1962–66	**Malaysia**	**RN, Army, RAF**
1963–66	Swaziland: Civil unrest	Army, RAF
1963	Zanzibar: Maintenance of stability	RN, Army, RAF
1963	Indonesia: Evacuation of British nationals	RAF
1963	Yugoslavia: Skopje earthquake	Army
1963–66	**Bahamas: Cuban expatriates and patrol**	**RN, RAF**
1963–66	**Cyprus: UN**	**RN, Army, RAF**
1964	**Zanzibar** **Tanganyika** **Uganda** **Kenya** — **Unrest and mutinies**	**RN, Army, RAF**
1964	Kenya: Tribal terrorism	RN, RAF
1964	Gan: Labour unrest	RAF
1965	Berlin: Air corridor	RAF
1965	Mauritius: Rioting	Army, RAF
1965	El Salvador: Earthquake	Army
1965	Bahamas: Hurricane	RN
1965	Rhodesia: UDI	RN, RAF
1965	Malaya: Floods	Army
1965	Bechuanaland: BBC transmitter	Army, RAF
1966	**Beira Channel: Patrol**	**RN, RAF**
1966	Hong Kong: Civil unrest	Army
1966	Das Island: Oil dispute	RN, Army
1966	Hong Kong: Floods	Army
1966	Seychelles: Political unrest	RN, Army
1966	Laos: Floods	Army, RAF

Summary

Major operations: 22
Minor operations: Military 44
Civil 19